4100 (OR-027) P

CERTIFIED MAIL
RETURN RECEIPT REQUESTED

Stacy Davies
Roaring Springs Ranch, Inc.
31433 Hwy 205
Frenchglen, Oregon 97736

NOTICE OF PROPOSED DECISION

Dear Mr. Davies:

You are receiving this Proposed Decision because you are the permit holder of record or an interested public.

Background

The Andrews Resource Area, Burns District, prepared the enclosed Environmental Assessment (EA) (OR-06-027-060) to analyze modification of the South Steens Allotment Management Plan (AMP) and effects to wild horses, grazing, and Wilderness Study Area (WSA) management in South Steens Allotment (#6002) from implementing Section 113 (e) (2), Section 202 (d) (2) and Title VI of the Steens Mountain Cooperative Management and Protection Act (Steens Act) of 2000. These sections apply to the land exchanges and establishment of the No Livestock Grazing Area, which encompasses approximately 97,229 acres within the designated Cooperative Management and Protection Area (CMPA). This action is pursued in the spirit of implementing the direction of Sections 1 and 102 of the Steens Act.

Compliance

The enclosed EA, *South Steens Allotment Management Plan/Environmental Assessment OR-06-027-060,* is tiered to the Andrews Management Unit/Steens Mountain CMPA Proposed Resource Management Plan (RMP) and Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and relevant information contained therein is incorporated by reference.

Multiple sections of the Steens Act provide direction to both manage for social and ecological health and for economic purposes. The following is a summarized list of pertinent sections:

> **SEC. 1:** Maintain the cultural, economic, ecological, and social health; provide for and expand cooperative management activities between public and private landowners; maintain and enhance cooperative and innovative management practices between public and private land managers; and promote viable and sustainable grazing on private and public lands.
>
> **SEC. 102:** Conserve, protect, and manage the long-term ecological integrity; maintain and enhance cooperative and innovative management projects between public and private; promote grazing that is sustainable; promote cooperation with private landowners; ensure the conservation, protection, and improved management of the ecological, social, and economic environment; and promote and foster cooperation, communication, and understanding and reduce conflict between users and interests.
>
> **SEC. 112:** Use of motorized or mechanized vehicles is not prohibited if the Secretary determines such use is needed for administrative purposes, or is appropriate for the construction or maintenance of agricultural facilities or ecological restoration projects, except in areas designated as wilderness or managed under the provisions of section 603(c) of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) of 1976. No new road or trail for motorized or mechanized vehicles may be constructed unless determined necessary for public safety or protection of the environment.
>
> **SEC. 113:** The Secretary shall be responsible for installing and maintaining any fencing required for resource protection within the designated no livestock grazing area. No new facilities may be constructed on Federal lands unless determined the structure will be minimal in nature, is consistent with the purposes of this Act, and is necessary for the management of livestock.
>
> **SEC. 204:** Under Section Title II, Section 204 (b), WSAs "shall continue to be managed under Section 603(c) of the FLPMA of 1976 [43 U.S.C. 1782(c)] in a manner so as not to impair the suitability of the areas for preservation as wilderness."

The Proposed Decision conforms to the following laws:

- Taylor Grazing Act (43 U.S.C 315 - 1934) Provides the basic legislative authority for livestock grazing on public lands with provisions for protection of the lands from degradation, for orderly use and improvement of public rangelands, and established standards for rangeland improvements.
- FLPMA (43 U.S.C. 1701, 1976).
- The FLPMA and Public Rangelands Improvement Act (43 U.S.C. 1901. 1978) mandate the management of public land for multiple use and sustained yield. Specifically, the regulations implementing these acts call for rangeland management strategies that provide forage for economic use as well as for maintenance or restoration of watershed function, nutrient cycling, water quality and habitat quality for Special Status Species (SSS) and native plants and animals. These management strategies have been supported and implemented by development of national policies and Standards for Rangeland Health and Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management for Public Lands Administered by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) in the States of Oregon and Washington (1997).
- Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act of 1971. Requires the BLM to protect and manage wild horses in areas they were found at the time the act was passed and in a manner designed to achieve and maintain a thriving ecological balance in keeping with the public land, multiple-use concept.
- National Environmental Policy Act (42 U.S.C. 4321-4347).

While the Proposed Decision is selected to follow specifically the direction of Sections 1 and 102 of the Steens Act, it is also designed to conform to the following documents to the maximum extent possible, which provides direction and guidelines for management of BLM-administered lands within Burns District:

- Steens Mountain CMPA RMP and Record of Decision (ROD) (August 2005).
- Steens Mountain Wilderness and Wild and Scenic Rivers (WSRs) Plan (August 2005).
- Standards for Rangeland Health and Guidelines for Livestock Management for Public Lands Administered by the BLM in the States of Oregon and Washington (1997).
- Burns District Noxious Weed Management Program EA (OR-020-98-05) (1998).
- Greater Sage-Grouse and Sagebrush-Steppe Ecosystems Management Guidelines (USDI-2000).
- BLM National Sage-Grouse Habitat Conservation Strategy (2004).
- Greater Sage-Grouse Conservation Assessment and Strategy for Oregon (Hagen 2005).
- Steens Mountain Travel Management Plan (TMP) (EA OR-05-027-021) (2007).
- North Steens Ecosystem Restoration Project ROD (2007).
- State, local, and Tribal land use plans and regulations.
- Interim Management Policy and Guidelines for Lands Under Wilderness Review (IMP) (1995).

Wilderness Study Area Assessment

Under Section Title II, Section 204 (b) of the Steens Act and Section 603(c) of FLPMA, the Secretary shall manage lands according to his authority and other applicable laws in a manner so as not to impair the suitability of such areas for preservation of wilderness and prevent unnecessary or undue degradation of the lands and their resources or to afford environmental protection. Section 102 of the Steens Act emphasizes conserving, protecting and managing the long-term ecological integrity of Steens Mountain and to promote grazing, recreation, historic and other uses that are sustainable. The Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act requires the BLM to protect and manage wild horses in areas they were found at the time the act was passed and in a manner designed to achieve and maintain a thriving ecological balance in keeping with the public land, multiple-use concept.

The BLM's 1995 Handbook 8550-1 IMP also provides policies and procedures for managing public lands administered by the BLM which are under wilderness review. The IMP provides guidance that the restoration, protection, and preservation of wilderness values are the "overriding consideration" of WSA management. However, "the IMP is not the only policy that governs the management of lands under wilderness review. The BLM has many other laws and policies to carry out which may affect whether and how an activity may take place on lands under wilderness review" (IMP page 2). The analysis summarized below illustrates compliance to Section 603(c) of FLPMA.

The Proposed Decision was developed to implement the long-term direction and objectives of the Steens Act, FLPMA and the Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act. While implementation of the Proposed Decision may not be viewed as following all specific guidelines of the IMP, it was developed in a manner so as not to impair the suitability of WSAs for preservation as wilderness and to prevent unnecessary or undue degradation of the lands and their resources as required under Section 603(c) of FLPMA.

> Chapter 1, Section B(2)(4) of the IMP provides an exception to the nonimpairment criteria for, "Uses or facilities that clearly protect or enhance the land's wilderness values . . ." An action that enhances wilderness values is one that clearly restores, protects, or maintains wilderness values. Chapter III, Section D(3)(c.) of BLM's 1995 Handbook 8550-1 Interim Management Policy and Guidelines for Lands Under Wilderness Review (IMP) provides for new permanent livestock developments if they "truly enhance wilderness values," are substantially unnoticeable, and they must not require motorized access if the area were designated as wilderness.

The Proposed Decision does not increase the permitted Animal Unit Months (AUMs) as required by the IMP for any new facilities. Based on the analysis provided in Chapter III of the EA, protecting sensitive riparian vegetation around springs within WSAs as identified in the Proposed Decision would truly enhance wilderness values and as such would meet one of the permitted exceptions to the IMP's non-impairment criteria.

There would also be some ecological benefits associated with the other proposed developments (reservoirs, a well and rerouting of Three Springs Route) in WSAs identified in the Proposed Decision. These benefits are associated with better distribution of wild horses, which are present year-round, as well as domestic livestock. Health and vigor of key forage species and other upland grasses would be maintained or in some areas improved by light to moderate grazing in previously ungrazed areas after additional water is available. The IMP emphasizes the "appearance" of naturalness and minimizing the imprints of human developments, while the primary purpose of the Steens Act is to conserve, protect and manage the long-term ecological integrity of Steens Mountain for future and present generations (see previous section outlining pertinent sections of the Steens Act).

While not all aspects of the developments may be viewed as following all guidelines of the IMP, the Proposed Decision was developed in a manner that would comply with Section 603(c) of FLPMA and the Steens Act for managing WSAs, while also addressing long-term management objectives and directives associated with other resource values in the CMPA as directed by the Steens Act. The types of developments (e.g., reservoirs, wells, spring developments, fencing) being proposed are similar in nature to those already present and found to be substantially unnoticeable in the WSAs within the allotment and many other WSAs when they were originally established as well as in designated wilderness in the CMPA.

Under the Proposed Decision, the developments being proposed within WSAs have been designed to minimize the visual effects of developments so that they are substantially unnoticeable. Design features have also been developed to minimize motorized access, which will be temporary in nature and is needed for construction and maintenance. All temporary routes shall be located to discourage establishment of new routes.

Cumulatively, the area influenced by both existing and proposed developments would be approximately 10.2 percent (3,229 acres) for Blitzen River WSA and 11.8 percent (3,308 acres) for South Fork Donner und Blitzen WSA. If implemented and after rehabilitation has occurred, the removal of four existing reservoirs in South Fork of Donner und Blitzen WSA would reduce the total influence of unnatural features in this WSA to 11.6 percent (3,249 acres). No rehabilitation of reservoirs would occur within the Blitzen River or Home Creek WSAs. In comparison this would be similar to the area influenced by unnatural features in two other WSAs (12 percent in both Bridge Creek and Stonehouse WSAs) within the CMPA at the time they were established (Volume I of the Oregon BLM Wilderness Study Report, 1991). Both Bridge Creek WSA (14,325 acres) and Stonehouse WSA (22,765 acres) are also smaller in size. The area influenced by existing unnatural features in Home Creek WSA is approximately 14 percent (165 acres) and no new developments would be implemented under this decision.

There would be some temporary and short-term (days) loss of solitude and disturbance to recreational activities in the immediate area during the installation of any development. Direct encounters between visitors and developments are expected to be limited to minutes as they pass by foot, horseback or vehicle. Disturbance associated with the presence of the developments and their use by livestock may displace some visitor if dispersed campsites are located nearby.

These effects are expected to be low for the WSAs as a whole, given the limited number of campsites that would potentially be affected. Overall effects to naturalness and solitude are expected to be low given the effects described above and no reduction in the availability or quality of recreation in the WSAs as a whole is expected. Based on the effects analysis in Chapter III of the EA no unnecessary or undue degradation of the lands and their resources would occur.

Given benefits to wilderness values and the limited area affected individually and cumulatively by the proposed developments in comparison to other WSAs as described above, it is not expected that implementing this Proposed Decision would impair any of the three WSAs suitability for preservation as wilderness by Congress and as such would comply with Section 603(c) of FLPMA.

Proposed Decision

Having considered the Proposed Decision and alternatives and associated impacts and based on analysis in EA OR-06-027-060, it is my decision to implement actions most closely aligned with the Proposed Action described in the EA which constructs, rehabilitates and decommissions water developments; authorizes issuance of a 10-year grazing permit; and modifies the 1995 AMP to make significant progress toward achieving Standards for Uplands-Riparian/Wetland Areas and Water Quality within Steens Pasture. Additionally, a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) found the Proposed Decision analyzed in OR-06-027-060 did not constitute a major Federal action that will adversely impact the quality of the human environment. Therefore, an EIS was unnecessary and will not be prepared.

The Proposed Decision will implement the AMP as described below:

South Steens Allotment Management Plan

Goals and Objectives:

Riparian: Goal – Maintain or improve riparian functioning condition of perennial and intermittent streams, and restore and maintain natural and free-flowing characteristics of wet meadows and associated springs

- √ *Objective:* Maintain Proper Functioning Condition (PFC) of 1.4 miles of two unnamed perennial tributaries to Donner und Blitzen River in Tombstone Pasture assessed for PFC in 1999.
- √ *Objective*: Maintain an upward trend in riparian vegetation on 2.4 miles of Home Creek in Home Creek Pasture so that wetland plant species continue to replace upland species within the greenline (refer to the riparian inventory study performed in 2003 for baseline information).

√ *Objective*: Improve vigor of woody riparian species on 2.4 miles of Home Creek in Home Creek Pasture so all age classes are present for the five willow species established in the greenline, and potential shade can be achieved (as constrained by cover of herbaceous species) within the next decade. This objective addresses the need to reduce stream temperature for redband trout habitat and Oregon Department of Environmental Quality 303d list concerns for Home Creek.

√ *Objective*: Restore natural and free-flowing characteristics of the Three Springs complex and associated meadow on BLM land, an unnamed spring in T. 34 S., R. 32¾ E., Section 19, along Three Springs Road, and an unnamed mesic/wet meadow system in T. 34 S., R. 32½ E., Section 36, all in South Steens Pasture. Protection and enhancement strategies should allow riparian areas to reach potential extent within one decade after implementation at each site, and achieve presence of at least 75 percent wetland species in the greenline within two decades (presence of woody riparian species is not expected or required at these sites).

Upland Areas: Goal - Manage uplands in a mosaic of native plant communities and seral stages.

Objective: Increase the relative frequency of key species such as Idaho fescue, bluebunch wheatgrass, mountain big sagebrush and forbs species that provide food for greater sage-grouse in the Tombstone, Steens, and Home Creek Pastures over the next 10 years.

√ *Objective*: Maintain the relative frequency of key species such as Indian rice grass, needleandthread grass, Thurber's needlegrass, bluebunch wheatgrass, Wyoming sagebrush and forbs species that provide food for greater sage-grouse in the Hollywood Pasture over the next 10 years.

√ *Objective*: Maintain frequency and distribution of bitterbrush in Steens and Tombstone Pastures over the next 10 years.

Wild Horses*:* Goal - Manage forage and water resources to provide and maintain a thriving natural ecological balance within the South Steens Allotment portion of the South Steens Herd Management Area (HMA).

√ *Objective*: Manage wild horse populations at an Appropriate Management Level (AML) of between 159 and 304 animals to provide and maintain a thriving natural ecological balance with all resource uses.

Wilderness/WSA: Goal - Maintain wilderness characteristics within Steens Mountain Wilderness (Home Creek portion) and Home Creek, Blitzen River and South Fork Donner und Blitzen River WSAs.

√ *Objective*: Maintain wilderness in a manner consistent with the Steens Mountain Wilderness and WSRs Management Plan (August 2005), Steens Act, Wilderness Act, and FLPMA.

√ *Objective*: Maintain Home Creek, Blitzen River and South Fork Donner und Blitzen River WSAs within South Steens Allotment in a manner consistent with the Steens Act and FLPMA.

WSR: Goals and objectives for the Donner und Blitzen WSR are outlined in the Steens Mountain Wilderness and WSRs Plan (2005, Appendix P, CMPA RMP).

Address the Following Resource Concerns

Steens Mountain CMPA, Steens Mountain Wilderness, riparian, water quality, SSS - greater sage-grouse, noxious weeds, WSAs, South Steens HMA, recreation and juniper encroachment.

Achieve the Following Standards:

Indicators for all five standards for rangeland health are present. They include: Standard 1. Watershed Function-Uplands; Standard 2. Watershed Function-Riparian; Standard 3. Ecological Processes; Standard 4. Water Quality; and Standard 5. Native, T&E, and Locally Important Species.

Grazing System:

Renewal of the 10-year grazing permit for 9,577 AUMs will occur in accordance with the AMP. No changes to the permitted number of AUMs will occur.

A grazing system that incorporates rest, deferment and adaptive management strategies will be utilized in achieving resource objectives (Adaptive Rotational Grazing). Considerations will be given to the previous year's monitoring results, as well as preseason monitoring and current climatic conditions such as drought and availability of water. The annual prescription for grazing will be determined during the annual user meeting between the permittee and the BLM, held prior to turnout. This may result in changes to stocking levels, pasture rotations and timing of grazing. These or other modifications will result in changes to the general schedule to attain utilization target levels of 50 percent and to achieve management objectives. Hollywood Pasture will primarily be used as trail-through pasture to get cattle to Tombstone Pasture from private ground or back to private from Tombstone Pasture.

Table 1: Grazing System

Pasture	Cows	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	AUMs
Hollywood	500	*Early/Defer	Rest	Early/Defer	Early/Defer	500
Tombstone	1,200	Early/Graze	Defer	Early/Graze	Defer	3,900
Steens	1,200	Defer	Early/Graze	Defer	Early/Graze	3,300
Home Creek	1,000	Early	Early	Early	Rest	1,850

*See Glossary in EA for definition

See Appendix A of the EA for a grazing schematic.

Authorized Flexibility:

Adjustments of up to 14 days may be allowed without prior authorization from the Field Manager for each of the grazing treatments to provide flexibility in meeting resource objectives.

Range Improvements:

Juniper management will occur as described in the North Steens Project ROD (2007). Range improvement projects may be funded under a cost share between the Burns District BLM and the permittee as specified in a cooperative agreement. The permittee has indicated a willingness to cost share range improvement projects.

The Proposed Decision will construct 13 new reservoirs, decommission 5 reservoirs, rehabilitate 14 reservoirs, drill 3 wells, install 2 miles of pipeline and 2 bottomless troughs, create 1 exclosure around a riparian meadow complex and rehabilitate Three Springs (a spring complex) and Weaver Place and Broken Leg Spring (along Three Springs Road) dugouts as described below.

The riparian condition at the dugout at Weaver Place will be enhanced by fencing the spring, installing up to two, approximately 4 by 12-foot troughs outside the exclosure and installing approximately 0.4-mile of pipeline. Troughs will not have floats rather water will be allowed to drain back into the system. The exclosure around the spring will be built using wooden posts and poles (split rail juniper), cut juniper obtained from the immediate area, barbed wire or a combination of types. Fencing will be determined site-specifically based on terrain and availability of juniper in the immediate area.

The riparian condition at the dugout along Three Springs Road (Broken Leg) will be enhanced by fencing the dugout, installing up to two, approximately 4 by 12-foot troughs outside the exclosure and installing approximately 0.4-mile of pipeline. Troughs will not have floats rather water will be allowed to drain back into the system. In order to effectively rehabilitate the dugout, the existing route will be realigned approximately 20 feet west of the dugout (upper end) for a distance of 20 yards. The new portion of this route will be created primarily by passage of a vehicle. However, to provide safe access, large rocks may need to be moved with equipment followed by filling holes with soil. This would be the only work allowed with equipment. The old route could be barricaded using downed juniper from the immediate area and reseeded, if necessary, using native seed. The exclosure around the dugout will be built using wooden posts and poles (split rail juniper), cut juniper obtained from the immediate area, barbed wire or a combination of types. Fencing will be determined site-specifically based on terrain and availability of juniper in the immediate area.

Three Springs complex located on BLM-administered and private lands will be protected by exclosure fencing. Fencing will be built using wooden posts and poles (split rail juniper), cut juniper obtained from the immediate area, barbed wire or a combination of types. Fencing type and location will be determined site-specifically based on terrain. Availability of juniper in the immediate area will also affect the type of fence to be constructed. Installation of troughs and pipelines will be deferred until such time as a need arises, such as failure of new or rehabilitated reservoirs, using an adaptive management approach. Up to four troughs (approximately 4 feet by 12 feet) will be installed outside the exclosure along with approximately.04-mile of pipeline. A pipe will not be installed for human consumption of water on BLM-administered lands. The BLM will work with Roaring Springs Ranch on development of this complex taking into consideration the Steens Mountain Advisory Council's (SMAC's) recommendation.

Troughs with an approximate 48 square feet (sq. ft.) area will be installed. The exact material for these troughs will be developed on a site-specific basis with every attempt to ensure they are as natural looking as possible. The intent and vision is to make them unnoticeable to a casual observer.

Riparian condition in an unnamed riparian-capable intermittent tributary and associated meadow complex in T. 34 S., R. 32½ E., Section 36 (tributary to Dry Creek) will be enhanced and maintained by construction of an exclosure which will eliminate effects of shear from both horses and cattle. The exclosure will be built using wooden posts and poles (split rail juniper), cut juniper obtained from the immediate area, barbed wire or a combination of types. Fencing will be determined site-specifically based on terrain and availability of juniper in the immediate area.

In addition, three wells will be drilled. Two of the three wells will have associated pipelines (approximately less than 2 miles) and two bottomless troughs (one at each location) installed along existing routes outside WSAs and buried storage tanks. Each well pump will be operated with a portable, fuel-powered generator. The need for the well at Long Dam will be ascertained after reservoir construction and reliability of new reservoirs following an adaptive management approach. Only the well pipe will be visible year-round within the existing footprint of Long Dam. When the well is in operation in years of extreme drought, a short (< 40-foot) piece of temporary pipe will be laid directly on top the ground and a portable generator will be used. Every attempt to screen and further muffle the sound of the generator will be made. The use of the well will be terminated once Long Dam is full.

No water gaps will be constructed. Other than riparian exclosure fencing necessary to protect spring sources and associated emergent vegetation and the riparian-capable intermittent tributary and associated meadow complex, no fence will be constructed and no fences will be removed.

No reservoirs will be decommissioned south of Lauserica Fence. If the remaining five reservoirs proposed for decommissioning have well-established upland vegetation, more of the dam will be left intact and earth moving will be limited to the minimum necessary to ensure the berm does not fail in the future. Where two reservoirs exist in close proximity to one another, ER9 and ER18 and reservoirs south of Lauserica Fence, one reservoir will be left as is while the other reservoir will be rehabilitated. Through site visits, BLM specialists will determine reservoirs to be rehabilitated and reservoirs to be left alone.

The Proposed Decision map does not reflect exact locations of reservoirs rather it provides a point of reference. Reservoirs will be constructed based on expertise from BLM specialists and the permittee who will take into account site-specific hydrologic, topographic, geologic, and soils characteristics, available material to construct the reservoir, and will be developed away from any sensitive vegetation (riparian areas).

Design features as described below will be utilized and other measures to ensure a natural-looking appearance for projects within WSA will be considered on a case-by-case, site-specific basis.

Table 2: Type of Action by WSA for the Proposed Decision

Blitzen River WSA		South Fork Donner und Blitzen WSA		Home Creek WSA	
Type of Action	Quantity	Type of Action	Quantity	Type of Action	Quantity
New Reservoirs	4	Metal Troughs[a]	8	Reservoir Rehabilitation	2
Reservoir Rehabilitation	1	New Reservoirs	9		
		Reservoir Rehabilitation	9		
		Reservoir Decommissioning	4		
		Spring Rehabilitation	3		
		Well Pipeline (miles)	0.75		
		Way Realignment	60 feet		
		Riparian Fence Exclosure	0.57-mile		
		Well at Long Dam	1		

[a]Metal troughs will be located together in two sets of two and one set of four in three different locations for the rehabilitation of springs.

Project Design Features

Project Design Features were developed to aid in meeting project goals and objectives. These features are nonexclusive and are subject to change based on site-specific terrain characteristics (topography and vegetation). Changes, additions or deletions will be made through coordination with appropriate BLM specialists or grazing permittee or SMAC and approved by the Authorized Officer. Applicable features will be applied as appropriate following advice and recommendations from the interdisciplinary team or grazing permittee or SMAC on a site-specific basis. All projects implemented within WSAs will be constructed to reduce impacts to wilderness values on a site-specific basis, and measures will be taken to ensure a more natural appearance including but not limited to the features described below. The SMAC "defines naturalized to include the use of natural materials and native vegetation to the greatest extent possible to minimize the visual intrusion of any manmade water developments. This can include, but is not limited to, using local rocks and junipers, matching natural slopes and contours, and planting native vegetation."

<u>Fencing</u>

No blading, grading, or vegetative brushing of routes for the fenceline will occur and spot removal of rock or vegetation will only occur when necessary. Pickups (if accessible) and four-wheel All-Terrain Vehicles (ATVs) will generally be used in construction. New exclosure fencing will occur in close proximity to a route. If any cross-country travel does occur within a WSA, travel will be done in a manner to reduce establishment of tracks and any tracks adjacent to a road or way will be hand raked the distance necessary to deter establishment of unauthorized routes.

Reservoirs

Reservoir embankments could be less than 10 to 20 feet high, and depending on the site, will likely be less than 150 feet in length. Slope on the downstream side will be a 2 to 1 ratio (2:1) and the upstream side will be 3:1. Spillways will generally be 15 feet wide or less and most will be 100 to 150 feet in length. Water volume and reservoir depth affect the length and width of the spillway. Reservoirs within WSAs will be designed and constructed to the extent possible to provide for a more natural-looking appearance. Construction will include removing brush and topsoil in the area of the reservoir and borrow area (an area with clay-type material). Most borrow areas are adjacent to the site. Material from the borrow area will be removed by a steel-tracked crawler and scraper and placed in layers at the reservoir site. There will be a disturbed area of approximately 2 acres. All disturbed areas will be reseeded after construction using a native/nonnative mix in areas outside WSA. Within WSAs, only native seeds will be used and vegetation (especially trees) providing screening to reservoirs will be left where possible. Other naturalization measures within WSAs such as shrub plantings and rock placement may occur as needed to reduce visual effects on a site-specific basis. Following seeding, the permanent footprint will be approximately 1-acre depending upon the depth of the reservoir. Access to the sites will be by existing road where available. If no access road is available, cross-country travel will occur. No access roads will be constructed. Within WSAs, any cross-country travel with equipment will be done in a manner to reduce establishment of tracks and any tracks adjacent to a road or way will be hand raked the distance necessary to deter the establishment of unauthorized routes.

Maintenance usually occurs approximately once every 20 years or following a natural event in the area. Reservoirs are cleaned out using a dozer or other equipment necessary and if the reservoir is not holding water, bentonite is applied. One trip a year with an ATV will be necessary to monitor and treat any weeds found, any cross-country travel will be conducted in a manner to reduce disturbance to soil and vegetation. This frequency may decline if no weeds are identified after several years of monitoring.

Decommissioning of Reservoirs

Where reservoirs have not reestablished upland vegetation and active erosion is occurring or is likely, the existing dam will be breached, and the berm will be recontoured to more closely resemble the setting. Bare soil will be seeded using native seed in WSAs or a native/nonnative mix outside WSAs. Within WSAs, any cross-country travel with equipment will be done in a manner to reduce establishment of tracks and any tracks adjacent to a road or way will be hand raked the distance necessary to deter the establishment of unauthorized routes.

Where two reservoirs exist in close proximity to one another south of Lauserica Fence, one reservoir will be left as is while the other reservoir will be rehabilitated. Through site visits, BLM specialists and the permittee will determine reservoirs to be rehabilitated and reservoirs to be left alone.

Rehabilitation of Reservoirs

Reservoirs proposed for rehabilitation will have spillways fixed by pushing rubble and rock from below the spillway with a dozer; dams will be repaired by sealing and packing material on top the dam with a dozer; and depth of reservoirs will be increased using a dozer to offset the effects of evaporation. Material may be obtained onsite or hauled in with a dump truck. Some reservoirs may require bentonite or alkali/clay material to be hauled to the site and packed with a dozer to seal the reservoir's bottom. Within WSAs any cross-country travel with equipment will be done in a manner to reduce the establishment of tracks and any tracks adjacent to a road or way will be hand raked the distance necessary to deter establishment of unauthorized routes.

Wells

Access for well-drilling equipment will use existing roads. Depending upon the site, some roads may need to be upgraded using a dozer, backhoe or grader for oversized trucks approximately 26 feet long. Only designated roads will be upgraded as necessary in accordance with the Transportation Plan and TMP. Any needed materials (rocks or soil) will be hauled with a dump truck.

The well site will consist of a disturbed area of approximately 100 by 100 feet within approximately 30 feet of a route. An 8 to 12-inch diameter hole will be drilled at each well site to accommodate casing (pipe). Casing will be used for the entire depth of the hole unless solid rock is encountered. If rock is encountered, the hole will not be cased within this section. To retrieve water from the wells a pump generated by fuel will be utilized. Pump size will be dependent upon depth of well and location of storage tank. Most fuel-powered generator pumps average 3 to 5 horse power.

Fuel-powered generators will likely be 5000 kilowatt and will operate within small enclosed trailers the size of a standard truck bed with a canopy during July 1 to December 1, as necessary, depending on the grazing rotation. Generators will likely run 8 to 16 hours a day depending on water consumption when in use and may be audible up to one-quarter mile. Technology is now available to use satellites to start, stop and notify when problems arise with the generators. The generator will be parked within 30 feet of an existing road and in an area already disturbed by installation of the tank or well. When portable generators are not in use, they will be removed.

Maintenance consists of checking the well yearly by pickup or ATV and replacing pumps as needed (life expectancy is 5 to 10 years). Replacing a pump will require a 1½ ton truck with a short tower capable of pulling pipe and pump from the well. To remove pipe casing a well rig will be required.

Pipelines

Pipeline trenches will be constructed using a steel-tracked crawler with ripper and plastic pipe laying apparatus and a rubber-tired backhoe. A trench will be dug with a simple ripping tooth to a depth of 18 to 24 inches and approximately 2 feet wide. A 2-inch black plastic (polyethylene) pipe will then be placed in the trench through the end of a ripper tooth. All disturbed areas will be reseeded after construction using a native/nonnative mix in areas outside WSA. Within WSAs, only native seeds will be used. Within WSAs the area will be further naturalized by returning most rocks (mossy side up) disturbed by pipeline installation to reduce the appearance of rock berms and to break up the linear shape of the pipeline.

It is possible a portion of the steel or black plastic pipe may lie directly on the ground or just beneath the ground's surface. Efforts will be made, however, to cover the pipes with dirt and vegetation.

Pipelines will be drained every fall/early winter. Inspections will occur annually at a minimum, using an ATV or pickup along existing trails. Pipelines will be replaced as necessary. Life expectancy for pipe is 20 years under good conditions.

Troughs

Bottomless troughs will be circular, 30 feet in diameter with a 4 to 6-inch concrete bottom, a 2 to 4-foot concrete apron to aid in erosion control, and hold 10,000 gallons of water. The sides of the trough will be 2 feet high and constructed of galvanized metal. A rubber-wheeled backhoe will be used to scrape dirt to form the area for a tough within approximately 30 feet of a route except for troughs associated with spring developments/ rehabilitation. A concrete truck will haul concrete to the site to construct the apron and add the 4 to 6-inch concrete bottom. The area disturbed during installation of the trough will be approximately 50 by 50 feet. A wildlife escape ramp will also be installed in the trough. Escape ramps could be fabricated of metal or may be a pile of rocks in one part of the trough. Larger bottomless troughs will have more than one escape ramp since there is more surface water, about 700 sq. ft. compared to smaller troughs (50 sq. ft.). These troughs are relatively maintenance free except for replacing trough floats and can last for several decades. Trough replacement will be the same as described above for original installation. Bottomless troughs will be constructed in association with wells.

Spring developments/rehabilitation will have approximately 4 by 12-foot troughs installed. The troughs associated with springs require the area to be leveled using a backhoe. Rock hauled by a dump truck is then put around the trough using a backhoe to reduce soil compaction by livestock and assist in blending the site with the surrounding area. Most troughs are approximately 4 by 12 feet resulting in a disturbed area of approximately 10 by 20 feet. Wildlife escape ramps will be installed in all troughs.

Trough floats are the biggest maintenance concern and some may need replacing every year. Troughs are inspected at a minimum of once per year using an ATV or pickup along an existing trail and are expected to last 10 years. Troughs not located on an existing way in WSA will be inspected by foot or horseback. Trough replacement will require the use of a rubber-wheeled backhoe.

Troughs may be partially buried using a rubber-wheeled backhoe. If not buried, troughs could be painted to blend in with the surrounding environment or other measures taken to make them more natural in appearance.

Storage Tanks

Storage tanks will be 8 feet high by 28 feet in length and hold 10,000 gallons of water. Storage tanks will be associated with wells and troughs, and will be buried within approximately 30 feet of a route. Buried tanks will disturb approximately a 12 feet wide by 36 feet long area. Areas disturbed will be contoured to blend in with the surrounding area and seeded with native/nonnative vegetation. Equipment necessary includes an excavator or backhoe, low-boy truck and trailer. Access will require use of a well-maintained road.

Maintenance consists of at least yearly inspections. Life expectancy is 20 years.

Spring Development/Rehabilitation

Spring development(s)/rehabilitation will consist of surrounding the springs with fence and installing a spring box to gather water, a pipe and an approximately 4 by 12-foot trough. Depending upon the area, the fence exclosure will be 2 to 6 acres (0.32 to .4-mile of fence).

Fences will be constructed using wooden posts and poles (split rail juniper), cut juniper obtained from the immediate area, barbed wire or a combination of types. Fencing will be determined site-specifically based on terrain and availability of juniper in the immediate area. If juniper is used, it will be cut and stacked to create a barrier and additional wildlife cover. Juniper branches will remain intact. Juniper logs and stumps obtained in WSAs will be rough-cut and moved by hand or with equipment already onsite. Springs boxes consisting of a 1½-foot diameter aluminum culvert and river rock will be installed using a rubber-wheeled backhoe. Culverts will be painted to blend in with the surrounding environment if portions of the culvert are visible. Pipe installation and trough placement are described above. Length of pipe will be determined by exclosure size, but should not be more than 0.4-mile.

Maintenance is minimal as spring developments should last 25 years. No maintenance will be required for juniper fencing.

Seeding

Seeding of areas disturbed by construction will occur with an ATV with a seeder attachment. Within WSAs, seeding will be completed by hand with native seed.

Route Realignment

Three Springs route passes directly through the spring (dugout) located at T. 34 S., R. 32¾ E., Section 19. The existing route will be realigned approximately 20 feet west of the spring (upper end) for a distance of 20 yards. The new portion of this route will be created primarily by passage of a vehicle. However, to provide safe access, large rocks may need to be moved with equipment followed by filling holes with soil. This would be the only work allowed with equipment. The old route could be barricaded using downed juniper from the immediate area and reseeded using native seed if necessary.

Other Design Features

1. Vehicles and equipment will be cleaned prior to entry to the site for project work to aid against spread of noxious weeds.
2. The BLM will inventory the project site for noxious weeds. Any weeds found will be treated, and the site will be monitored for new weed introductions. Any new weeds found will be treated using the most appropriate methods.
3. The proposed pipeline trench will be left open long enough for cultural resource review studies to occur before project completion.
4. A cultural resource inventory is required prior to any range or other project construction. Certain fence locations such as adjacent to riparian areas (rivers, streams, and springs) will be inventoried for cultural sites. Clearances or monitoring will be needed at existing range developments that will be used or retired. Direct effects to sites located near (within 100 yards) or within proposed developments can be mitigated through various means such as avoidance, surface collection, mapping, testing or full-scale excavation.
5. Cultural resources inventory will be needed in the allotment to locate and evaluate archaeological sites that could be within the additional livestock and wild horse congregation areas. Sites eligible for listing to the National Register of Historic Places within congregation areas will be avoided to mitigate potential effects. If avoidance is not a viable mitigation option, other measures such as surface collecting and mapping, testing and full-scale excavation could be used.

Adaptive Management

Adaptive management is a system of management practices based on clearly identified outcomes and monitoring to determine if management actions are meeting desired outcomes; and, if not, facilitating management changes that will best ensure outcomes are met or reevaluated. Adaptive management recognizes that knowledge about natural resource systems is sometimes uncertain and, in this context, adaptive management affords an opportunity for improved understanding. Knowing uncertainties exist in managing for sustainable ecosystems, changes to the proposal may be authorized for reasons such as, but not limited to:

- √ Failure of existing reservoirs in which case decommissioning of other reservoirs may not occur
- √ Failure of rehabilitated reservoirs in which case decommissioning of other reservoirs may not occur

- √ Adjustment on the number of water developments constructed
    - o Water developments may be constructed in a phased-in approach using adaptive management practices and taking budget constraints into consideration.

Criteria for determining success of rehabilitated or new reservoirs include:

- √ The ability of the reservoir to hold water from July through October (dry season).
- √ The ability of the reservoir to accommodate 20 to 100 head of livestock or horses during the dry season depends upon:
    - o Size of reservoir,
    - o Size of surrounding area it will serve,
    - o Topography of the area,
    - o Forage available, and
    - o The reservoirs show no signs of maintenance issues such as erosion, ability to handle flow capacity, or inadequate overflow.
- √ Size of reservoir will be dependent upon amount of available material with which it is constructed.

Determination of reservoir functionality will be in cooperation between BLM specialists and the grazing permittee.

Billing: After-the-fact billing will be authorized and actual use forms will be turned in within 2 weeks of removing livestock from the allotment.

Monitoring needs and schedule: "I" category allotments receive long-term trend monitoring every 5 years. Method used to determine trend will be Pace 180° frequency method. Utilization monitoring is performed yearly after every pasture move with route transect performed by vehicle and horseback. Riparian monitoring will also be completed every 5 years using Greenline method. In addition, use supervision will be performed periodically (up to three times per month) to determine if the management system is being followed. An evaluation of management objectives and actions will be completed within 5 years of implementation of this AMP.

COMMENTS RECEIVED

A scoping letter was mailed to 241 agencies, organizations and individuals on December 22, 2006. The BLM received 49 comment letters. A copy of the EA and unsigned FONSI were mailed to 24 agencies, organizations, and individuals and an electronic message was sent to 39 individuals providing notice the EA and FONSI were available at: www.blm.gov/or/districts/burns/plans/index.php. In addition, a notice was posted in the *Burns Times-Herald* newspaper on September 10, 2008. The Burns District BLM received five comment letters. In addition the SMAC provided a recommendation on September 23, 2008. This Proposed Decision includes aspects of the SMAC's recommendation (Attachment 1).

The BLM received a comment letter from Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) regarding effects to sage-grouse and mule deer habitat. Please see Attachment 2 for BLM's response to ODFW.

Please see Attachment 3 for a summary of Responses to Public Comments.

Changes between September 5, 2008 EA and this Proposed Decision not Addressed in Responses

Route Realignment – Language was added to allow use of heavy equipment to remove rocks from the new route created primarily by passage of a vehicle.

Other Design Features – changes were made to the cultural design features (4 and 5) to add clarity.

RATIONALE

This decision is based on public comments, the recommendation from the SMAC, consultation with local governments and State agencies, discussions with the permittee, discussions with and consideration of the Cooperative Management Agreement with the Steens Mountain Landowners Group, requirements to make significant progress toward achieving Standards for Rangeland Health, conformance to applicable laws and regulations, meeting the Purpose of and Need for Action, and meeting the purposes and objectives of the Steens Act, FLPMA, and Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act. This decision is necessary to achieve long-term objectives of the specific and more recent authority provided by the Steens Act while also complying with and blending and balancing the requirements of FLPMA and the Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act. Therefore, I have decided the Proposed Decision as stated above best meets the intent of the Steens Act while adhering to other applicable laws and regulations.

I also selected the Proposed Decision based on the following Decision Factors (outside laws and regulations). Decision Factors are additional questions or statements used by the decision maker to choose between alternatives that best meet project goals and resource objectives. These factors generally do not include satisfying legal mandates, which must occur under all alternatives. Rather Decision Factors assess, for example, the comparative cost, applicability, or adaptability of the alternatives considered.

- Is the cost of implementing the alternative reasonable?

  It is estimated the cost to construct all water developments is $453,100. The permittee has verbally agreed to help with construction of these developments, so the cost to the BLM should be less. Until a formal agreement is made with the permittee, the estimated savings to BLM cannot be accurately calculated. Implementation of water developments will likely occur over the course of a decade and will be dependent upon staffing and funding. Some range improvements may not be constructed, such as Three Springs Complex pipelines and troughs, should new and rehabilitated reservoirs prove to be reliable water sources for livestock and wild horses.

- Will the alternative meet the goals and objectives as stated in the EA?

  Please see below as the goals and objectives are addressed individually.

- Is implementation of the alternative practical?

  With assistance from the permittee in developing additional water and using an adaptive management approach, implementing the Proposed Decision is practical. Additionally, water sources will help distribute wild horses and livestock throughout the four pastures in South Steens Allotment to conserve, protect, and manage the long-term ecological integrity, while promoting viable and sustainable grazing and healthy wild horse populations. As proposed, BLM will use design features to prevent impairment of wilderness suitability or to enhance wilderness values.

- What is the adaptability of the alternative?

  The Proposed Decision is adaptable as described under the Adaptive Management Section above.

Goals/objectives:

1. **Maintain, restore or improve the integrity of desirable vegetation communities including perennial, native, and desirable introduced plant species. Providing for their continued existence and normal function in nutrient, water and energy cycles (RMP-30).** Over the next decade, as livestock access portions of the Project Area where water was unavailable or not reliable prior to implementation, vigor of key forage (bunchgrass) species subject to light to moderate grazing within utilization guidelines may be maintained or improved. Vegetation communities will continue to support achievement of rangeland health standards for ecological processes (nutrient, hydrologic and energy cycles).

2. **Manage rangeland habitats so forage, water, cover, structure and security necessary to meet the life history requirements of wildlife are available on public lands (RMP-31).** Exclusion of livestock and wild horses from existing spring sources will improve these areas for wildlife use by providing water and restoring riparian/wetland vegetation which some wildlife depend on during the late summer months. More water sources will benefit some wildlife species.

3. **Maintain, restore or improve Special Status plant populations and animal habitats; manage public lands to conserve or contribute to the recovery of threatened or endangered species; and prevent future Endangered Species Act listings (RMP-35).** Construction of new reservoirs could have a beneficial effect for diverse-leaved pondweed by providing more habitat and allowing the plants to spread naturally to new areas. New populations could be established in reservoirs that hold water for at least most of the year. Exclusion of livestock and wild horses from existing spring sources will improve these areas for sage-grouse use by providing water and restoring riparian/wetland vegetation which sage-grouse depend on during the late summer months. Increased late-season water could benefit bat species by providing more watering areas. This may lead to some increased population numbers but this is dependent on available roost/maternity sites as well as available insect populations. Conservation guidelines as outlined in the "Greater Sage-Grouse Conservation Assessment and Strategy for Oregon" (Strategy) (Hagen 2005) and as stated on pages 12-20 and 49-50 of the EA will be followed to further reduce impacts to sage-grouse.

4. **Manage public lands to provide social and economic benefits to local residents, businesses, visitors, and future generations (RMP-46).** Some visitor's perception of solitude and experience may be affected temporarily during construction, but the area will still offer outstanding opportunities for solitude. Hunting/wildlife viewing may increase. Economic opportunities for local contractors/suppliers will be provided. Implementation will allow the permittee to utilize all allotted AUMs providing economic benefits.

5. **Manage and maintain healthy wild horse herds in established HMAs at AMLs to maintain a thriving natural ecological balance between wild horse populations, wildlife, livestock, vegetation resources, and other resource values. Enhancing and perpetuating the special or rare and unique characteristics that distinguish the respective herds (RMP-50).** Development of reliable, live water is essential to sustain wild horses in drought conditions and ensure proper animal distribution. Development of numerous reliable late-season water sources reduces concentrations of wild horses at individual water sources lessening the chance of disease transmission. Proper animal distribution allows the habitat to be evenly utilized helping to ensure maintenance at the AML. The AML was established to use available habitat while providing long-term viability. Also, the established AML is currently at a number that ensures genetic viability of wild horses which the BLM monitors and introduces other wild horses when needed.

6. **Manage and maintain a viable population of wild horses with livestock, wildlife, recreation and watershed resource values (South Steens HMA Plan, page 1).** See responses to 2, 3, and 5 above.

7. **Maintain/improve year-round water sources to sustain wild horse herds (RMP-50).** See response to 5 above.

8. **Maintain herd viability, genetic diversity, and the genetic and physical characteristics that distinguish individual herds (RMP-50).** See response to 5 above.

9. **Maintain water sources critical to wild horses; develop additional water sources to improve animal distribution and provide more stable water sources during periods of drought if needed to protect wilderness resources and wilderness values; and seek cooperative management agreements for access to or acquire legal access to private water sources critical to wild horses (Steens Mountain Wilderness and WSRs Plan, page 49).** See response to 5 above. In addition a cooperative management agreement with the permittee will be prepared to allow use of private lands to implement components of the Proposed Decision.

10. **Manage for a sustained level of livestock grazing while maintaining healthy public land resources (RMP-53).** After all new developments and reservoir rehabilitation are completed, the increase in distribution and arrangement of reliable clean watering sites will ensure water will likely no longer limit full use of authorized AUMs, even during years when precipitation is well below average. Although some portions of the allotment will still be greater than 2 miles from drinking water, the alternative will disperse both cattle and horses more evenly throughout the allotment, decrease demand on any individual water source, and distribute grazing effects to vegetation and soils (especially riparian soils) more evenly within the allotment. Protection of springs will improve water quality at these sites, which will likely improve livestock health.

11. **Implement administrative solutions and rangeland projects to provide proper management for livestock grazing while meeting resource objectives and requirements for Standards for Rangeland Health and Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management for Public Lands in Oregon and Washington (S&Gs) (RMP-53).** See response to 10 above. In addition, rehabilitation of two existing dugouts to natural spring characteristics, rehabilitation of a spring complex, and fencing an unnamed riparian-capable intermittent tributary and associated meadow will eliminate grazing animal access to riparian soils saturated year-round, forcing them to congregate on firmer upland soils. Without annual disturbance from hoof chiseling by horses and cattle, the extent and function of riparian soils would expand within topographic limits at these sites and support riparian vegetation. Since troughs fed by springs would include float valves to assure flows in excess of animal needs would be diverted back to riparian areas, response of wetland vegetation will be immediate, and will likely reach potential extent within the following decade. Fencing of these riparian-potential areas will make significant progress toward achieving the Rangeland Health Standards for water quality and riparian/wetland areas.

12. **Manage existing WSAs so as not to impair their suitability for preservation as wilderness (RMP-80).** The Proposed Decision was developed to meet the long-term objectives of the Steens Act, FLPMA, and the Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act. While the Proposed Decision may not follow all of the specific guidelines of the IMP it was developed in a manner so as not to impair the suitability of WSAs for preservation as wilderness and to prevent unnecessary or undue degradation of the lands and their resources as required under Section 603(c) of FLPMA.

13. **Protect and enhance the Outstandingly Remarkable Values (ORVs) of the designated WSRs (RMP-82).** Not affected by the Proposed Decision.

14. **Provide adequate quality forage, maintain satisfactory riparian conditions and improve riparian conditions where less than satisfactory conditions exist (South Steens Wild Horse HMA Plan Update, Appendix E).** See response to 11 above.

I did not select the No Action Alternative or the other action alternatives for reasons described in the table below.

Decision Factor/ Goals/Objectives	Alternative A (No Action Alternative)	Alternative B (Maximum)	Alternative C (Along Roads)	Alternative D (Edge of WSAs)
Is the cost of implementing the alternative reasonable?	There would be no additional costs as no developments would occur.	Estimated to be $900,000. Estimate does not include decommissioning and rehabilitating reservoirs or assistance from the permittee.	Estimated to be $888,000. Estimate does not include rehabilitating reservoirs or assistance from the permittee.	Estimated to be $661,500. Estimate does not include decommissioning and rehabilitating reservoirs or assistance from the permittee.
Will the alternative meet the goals and objectives as stated in the EA?	Please see below where each goal/objective is addressed.	Please see below where each goal/objective is addressed.	Please see below where each goal/objective is addressed.	Please see below where each goal/objective is addressed.
Is implementation of the alternative practical?	No new water sources would be developed; therefore, no additional costs would be incurred. Water sources to help distribute wild horses and livestock to conserve, protect and manage the long-term ecological integrity, while promoting viable and sustainable grazing and healthy wild horse populations would not be realized. Exclosures would not be constructed affecting the ability of Standards for water quality and riparian/wetland areas to be met.	Costs to develop water sources are estimated at $900,000 without assistance from the permittee. An adaptive management approach would be utilized. Additionally, water sources would help distribute wild horses and livestock to conserve, protect and manage the long-term ecological integrity, while promoting viable and sustainable grazing and healthy wild horse populations. As proposed, design features to prevent impairment of wilderness suitability or to enhance wilderness values would also be used. The exclosure around an unnamed riparian-capable intermittent tributary and associated meadow complex would not be constructed affecting the ability of Standards for water quality and riparian/wetland areas to be met.	Same as Alternative B except costs are estimated to be $888,000. Standards for water quality and riparian/wetland areas could not be achieved.	Costs are estimated to be $661,500 and distribution of grazing animals would not be realized as well as Alternative B as the interior of the allotment would be left without live, reliable water affecting the long-term ecological integrity of the area, sustainable grazing and healthy wild horse populations. The exclosure around an unnamed riparian-capable intermittent tributary and associated meadow complex would not be constructed affecting the ability of Standards for water quality and riparian/wetland areas to be met.

Decision Factor/ Goals/Objectives	Alternative A (No Action Alternative)	Alternative B (Maximum)	Alternative C (Along Roads)	Alternative D (Edge of WSAs)
What is the adaptability of the alternative	This is no adaptability under this alternative.	The alternative is adaptable using the adaptive management approach as described above.	The alternative is adaptable using the adaptive management approach as described above. However, no new reservoirs were proposed limiting flexibility.	The alternative is adaptable using the adaptive management approach as described above. However, with only water developments along the outer edge of the allotment, flexibility would be limited.
Goals and Objectives				
1. Maintain, restore or improve the integrity of desirable vegetation communities. Providing for their continued existence and normal function in nutrient, water and energy cycles (RMP-30).	Exclosures would not be constructed affecting the ability of Standards for water quality and riparian/wetland areas to be met and the areas' ability to reach potential. Upland vegetation species would continue to receive uneven utilization.	Over the next decade, as livestock access portions of the Project Area where water was unavailable or not reliable prior to implementation, vigor of key forage (bunchgrass) species subject to light to moderate grazing within utilization guidelines may be maintain or improved.	Over the next decade, as livestock access portions of the Project Area where bunchgrasses have become decadent, trampling and light to moderate grazing may begin to improve vigor of plants. However, a larger proportion of the Project Area (greater than 1 to 2 miles away from a water source) would still be lightly used or unused, especially in dry years.	Since new water sources would be mostly at or near pasture boundaries, grazing in pasture interiors, especially in Steens Pasture 2 and Home Creek Pasture 3, would probably not change much, if at all.
2. Manage rangeland habitats so forage, water, cover, structure and security necessary to meet requirements of wildlife (RMP-31).	Wildlife species (including migratory birds) in general in the project area are not affected by current water distribution. Current heavy use of forage resources near existing springs and water holes may be affecting wildlife forage near these sources. Wild horse use of these water sources may preclude wildlife use in the area.	Wildlife would be affected by an increase in water sources and would benefit some species. Most permanent water sources (troughs and reservoirs) for late season use by livestock would affect bitterbrush stands, important mule deer forage in fall-winter and would reduce some wildlife resources near new water troughs and reservoirs.	Similar in affects to Alternative B except that more troughs would be installed with fewer reservoirs. More permanent late-season water (troughs) would be available in more places. Effects near these sources would be similar to those described in Alternative B.	Effects would be less than described in Alternatives B or C since fewer reservoirs and troughs would be installed but more than with the No Action Alternative. Of the action alternatives, this one has the fewest effects on bitterbrush for mule deer since fewer water sources would be installed near bitterbrush stands.

Decision Factor/ Goals/Objectives	Alternative A (No Action Alternative)	Alternative B (Maximum)	Alternative C (Along Roads)	Alternative D (Edge of WSAs)
		Fencing of existing springs would protect these areas and make them more suitable for wildlife use.		This alternative would improve spring resources and allow for wildlife to use those areas more readily.
3. Maintain, restore or improve Special Status plant populations and animal habitats; manage public lands to conserve or contribute to the recovery of threatened or endangered species; and prevent future listings (RMP-35).	Special Status Wildlife Species are not affected by current distribution of water in the project area. Current heavy use of forage resources near existing springs and water holes may be affecting wildlife forage near these sources. Wet meadow areas near springs and seeps may be limiting late-season brood-rearing habitat for sage-grouse. Known nesting habitat for sage-grouse is not affected by late-season use by livestock and wild horses. Construction of new reservoirs could have a beneficial effect for diverse-leaved pondweed by providing more habitat and allowing plants to spread naturally to new areas. New populations could be established in reservoirs that hold water for at least most of the year.	New populations could be established in reservoirs holding water for at least most of the year. Exclusion of livestock and wild horses from existing spring sources would improve these areas for sage-grouse use by providing water and restoring riparian/wetland vegetation which sage-grouse depend on during the late summer months. Late- season use by livestock and wild horses may affect residual nest cover the following spring. Increased late-season water could benefit bat species by providing more watering areas. This may lead to some increased population numbers but this would be dependent on available roost/maternity sites as well as available insects. Effects of this alternative on diverse-leaved pondweed would be more potential habitat would be created.	Effects of this alternative on SSS wildlife would be similar to Alternative B since there would be a similar number of water sources. This alternative would provide more reliable yearlong water sources spreading out late season livestock and wild horse use. This would affect residual nesting cover for sage-grouse. Effects would be similar for bats. More potential habitat would be created for diverse-leaved pondweed.	This alternative would still have some of the same effects as Alternative B and C, but would be less since fewer water sources are planned. Use of late-season forage by livestock and wild horses would still affect residual nesting cover for sage-grouse but this would occur in fewer areas. Bats would have fewer water sources but water may not be a limiting factor for bats. Potential habitat would be created for diverse-leaved pondweed but less than under Alternatives B and C.

Decision Factor/ Goals/Objectives	Alternative A (No Action Alternative)	Alternative B (Maximum)	Alternative C (Along Roads)	Alternative D (Edge of WSAs)
4. Manage public lands to provide social and economic benefits to local residents, businesses, visitors, and future generations (RMP-46).	No effects to a visitor's experience or opportunities are expected. No new contracts would be awarded. The permittee may continue to remove livestock early in drought years.	Some visitor's perception of solitude and experience may be affected, but the area would still offer outstanding opportunities for solitude. Hunting/wildlife viewing may increase. Economic opportunities for local contractors/suppliers would be provided. This alternative would allow the permittee to utilize all allotted AUMs.	Some visitor's perception of solitude and experience may be affected, but the area would still offer outstanding opportunities for solitude. Hunting/wildlife viewing may increase. Economic opportunities for local contractors/suppliers would be provided, but less than under Alternative B. This alternative would allow the permittee to utilize all allotted AUMs.	Some visitor's perception of solitude and experience may be affected, but the area would still offer outstanding opportunities for solitude. Hunting/wildlife viewing may increase. Economic opportunities for local contractors/suppliers would be provided, but less than under Alternatives B and C. This alternative could mean lower weaning weights for calves, lower breed-back percentages and overall lower livestock health.
5. Manage and maintain healthy wild horse herds to maintain a thriving natural ecological balance between wild horse populations, wildlife, livestock, vegetation resources, and other resource values. Enhancing and perpetuating the special or rare and unique characteristics that distinguish the respective herds (RMP-50).	Animal distribution would continue to be problematic as some areas would be overutilized while other areas would be underutilized by grazing animals. In severe drought years, horses could die due to lack of water. Portions of the HMA would continue to be isolated resulting in genetic isolation (inbreeding) of some wild horses.	Animals would be evenly distributed with additional water developments resulting in forage utilization being evenly distributed and reducing or eliminating areas of overuse. Portions of the HMA would continue to be isolated resulting in genetic isolation of some wild horses.	Since only troughs associated with wells and springs (19) would be installed, lack of new reservoirs would leave larger distances between reliable water sources leaving portions of the HMA without reliable water resulting in concentrations of livestock and wild horses in areas with water. Distribution of grazing animals would not occur as well and leaves portions of the area overused and portions underused.	This alternative would result in the center of the HMA being underwatered. During drought conditions, wild horses and livestock would concentrate at these sources and forage use around these areas would be overutilized while other areas were unused.

Decision Factor/ Goals/Objectives	Alternative A (No Action Alternative)	Alternative B (Maximum)	Alternative C (Along Roads)	Alternative D (Edge of WSAs)
6. Manage and maintain a viable population of wild horses with livestock, wildlife, recreation and watershed resource values (South Steens HMA Plan, page 1).	See response to 5 above.	See response to 5 above.	See response to 5 above.	See response to 5 above.
7. Maintain/improve year-round water sources to sustain wild horse herds (RMP-50).	See response to 5 above.	See response to 5 above.	See response to 5 above.	See response to 5 above.
8. Maintain herd viability, genetic diversity, and the genetic and physical characteristics that distinguish individual herds (RMP-50).	See response to 5 above.	See response to 5 above.	See response to 5 above.	See response to 5 above.
9. Maintain water sources critical to wild horses; develop additional water sources to improve animal distribution and provide more stable water sources during periods of drought if needed to protect wilderness resources and wilderness values; and seek cooperative management agreements for access to or acquire legal access to private water sources critical to wild horses (Steens Mountain Wilderness and WSRs Plan, P-49).	See response to 5 above.	See response to 5 above.	See response to 5 above.	See response to 5 above.
10. Manage for a sustained level of livestock grazing while maintaining healthy public land resources (RMP-53).	Licensed AUMs would not be utilized in drought years. Rangeland Health Standards for water quality and riparian/wetland areas would not be achieved.	After all new developments and rehabilitation are complete, increase in distribution and arrangement of reliable water would help ensure use of all licensed AUMs.	Distribution and arrangement of reliable clean watering sites would still restrict distribution of livestock and leave interior portions of South Steens Pasture 2 lightly used or completely unused.	This alternative may limit full use of authorized AUMs during dry years or if utilization of key species reaches target levels around watering sites before the authorized season of use has ended.

Decision Factor/ Goals/Objectives	Alternative A (No Action Alternative)	Alternative B (Maximum)	Alternative C (Along Roads)	Alternative D (Edge of WSAs)
		The alternative would disperse both cattle and horses more evenly throughout the allotment, decrease demand on any individual water source, and distribute grazing effects to vegetation soils more evenly. Development of springs would improve water quality at these sites, which would likely improve livestock health and performance factors. However, livestock and wild horses would not be excluded from an unnamed riparian-capable intermittent tributary and associated meadow affecting ability to achieve Standards for water quality and riparian/wetland areas.	This alternative may limit full use of authorized AUMs during years if utilization of key species reaches target levels around watering sites before the authorized season of use has ended.	Therefore, this alternative is unlikely to achieve this objective.
11. Implement administrative solutions and rangeland projects to provide proper management for livestock grazing while meeting resource objectives and requirements for Standards and Guidelines (RMP-53).	See response to 10 above.	See response to 10 above.	See response to 10 above.	See response to 10 above.
12. Manage existing WSAs so as not to impair their suitability for preservation as wilderness (RMP-80).	No changes to WSAs would occur.	Proposed developments within Blitzen River WSA would affect naturalness in approximately 597 acres (1.9%) of the WSA.	The proposed developments within Blitzen River WSA would affect naturalness in approximately 410 acres (1.3 percent) of the WSA.	No new developments would occur within either the Blitzen River or the Home Creek WSAs.

Decision Factor/ Goals/Objectives	Alternative A (No Action Alternative)	Alternative B (Maximum)	Alternative C (Along Roads)	Alternative D (Edge of WSAs)
		The total area influenced by existing and proposed unnatural developments in Blitzen River WSA would be approximately 11.6% (3,712 acres) for this alternative. Proposed developments within South Fork Donner und Blitzen WSA would affect naturalness in approximately 1,244 acres (4.5%) of the WSA. Total area influenced by existing and proposed unnatural developments in South Fork Donner und Blitzen WSA would be approximately 13.9% (3,880 acres) for this alternative. If removal of existing reservoirs occurs, wilderness values would be enhanced on approximately 60 acres and reduce overall acres affected by unnatural features to 13.7%. Proposed reservoir rehabilitation and decommissioning within Home Creek WSA would affect naturalness in approximately 2.5 acres (0.21%) of the WSA.	The total area influenced by existing and proposed unnatural developments in Blitzen River WSA would be approximately 11.1% (3,525 acres) for this alternative. The proposed developments within South Fork Donner und Blitzen WSA would affect naturalness in approximately 1,004 acres (3.6%) of the WSA. The total area influenced by existing and proposed unnatural developments in South Fork Donner und Blitzen WSA would be approximately 13.0% (3,640 acres) for this alternative. Removal of existing fences would enhance wilderness values on approximately 204 acres and reduce overall acres affected by unnatural features in the WSA to 12.3%. The proposed pipeline within Home Creek WSA would affect naturalness in approximately 1-acre (0.08%) of the WSA.	Proposed developments within South Fork Donner und Blitzen WSA would affect naturalness in approximately 270 acres (1%) of the WSA. The total area influenced by existing and proposed unnatural developments in South Fork Donner und Blitzen WSA would be approximately 10.4% (2,899 acres) for this alternative. Removal of existing fences would enhance wilderness values on approximately 446 acres and reduce overall acres affected by unnatural features in the WSA to 8.8%. For the South Fork Donner und Blitzen WSA effects to solitude and recreation would be similar to Alternative B, except fewer developments would occur, reducing the potential for encounters and fewer dispersed campsites would be affected, reducing the potential for visitor displacement.

Decision Factor/ Goals/Objectives	Alternative A (No Action Alternative)	Alternative B (Maximum)	Alternative C (Along Roads)	Alternative D (Edge of WSAs)
		If decommissioning of reservoirs occurs, the area influenced by unnatural features in this WSA would be reduced following revegetation approximately 120 acres to 10.3%. For all WSAs, there would be some temporary and short-term (days) loss of solitude and disturbance to recreational activities in the immediate area during the installation of any development. Direct encounters between visitors and developments are expected to be limited to minutes as they pass by foot, horseback or vehicle. Disturbance associated with the presence of the developments and their use by livestock may displace some visitor if dispersed campsites are located nearby. These effects are expected to be low for the WSAs as a whole, given the limited number of campsites that would potentially be affected.	Overall the area influenced by the existing and proposed unnatural developments in Home Creek WSA would remain at 14%. For all WSAs, the types of effects to solitude and recreation would be similar to Alternative B, except fewer developments would occur, reducing the potential for encounters and fewer dispersed campsites would be affected, reducing the potential for visitor displacement.	
13. Protect and enhance the ORVs of the designated WSRs (RMP-82).	Not affected.	Not affected.	Not affected.	Not affected.

Decision Factor/ Goals/Objectives	Alternative A (No Action Alternative)	Alternative B (Maximum)	Alternative C (Along Roads)	Alternative D (Edge of WSAs)
14. Provide adequate quality forage, maintain satisfactory riparian conditions and improve riparian conditions where less than satisfactory conditions exist (South Steens Wild Horse HMA Plan Update, Appendix E).	See response to 10 above. Additionally, utilization throughout the allotment would continue to be less than the 50% target. Local areas of declining bunchgrass health have been observed.	An exclosure around the riparian meadow would not be constructed.	An exclosure around the riparian meadow would not be constructed.	An exclosure around the riparian meadow would not be constructed.

PROTEST AND APPEAL PROCEDURES

Any applicant, permittee, lessee or other affected interest may protest a Proposed Decision under Sec. 43 CFR 4160.1, in person or in writing to Joan Suther, Andrews Resource Area Field Manager, Bureau of Land Management, Burns District Office, 28910 Hwy 20 West, Hines, Oregon 97738 within 15 days after receipt of such decision. The protest, if filed, should clearly and concisely state the reason(s) as to why the Proposed Decision is in error.

In the absence of a protest, the Proposed Decision will become the final decision of the authorized officer without further notice unless otherwise provided in the Proposed Decision.

Any applicant, permittee, lessee or other person whose interest is adversely affected by the final decision may file an appeal of the decision. An appellant may also file a petition for stay of the decision pending final determination on appeal. The appeal and petition for stay must be filed in the office of the authorized officer, as noted above, within 30 days following receipt of the final decision, or within 30 days after the date the Proposed Decision becomes final. The petition for a stay and a copy of the appeal must also be filed with the Office of Hearings and Appeals at the following address:

United States Department of the Interior
Office of Hearings and Appeals
405 South Main Street, Suite 400
Salt Lake City, Utah 84111

The appeal must be in writing and shall state the reasons, clearly and concisely, why the appellant thinks the final decision is in error and also must comply with the provisions of 43 CFR 4.470.

A petition for stay, if filed, shall show sufficient justification based on the following standards (43 CFR 4.21(b)):

(1) The relative harm to the parties if the stay is granted or denied.
(2) The likelihood of the appellant's success on the merits.
(3) The likelihood of immediate and irreparable harm if the stay is not granted, and
(4) Whether the public interest favors granting the stay.

As noted above, the petition for stay must be filed in the office of the authorized officer.

Sincerely,

/signature on file/

Joan M. Suther
Andrews Resource Area Field Manager

6 Enclosures
1 – Attachment 1, SMAC's recommendation (2 pages)
2 – Attachment 2, BLM's response to ODFW (1 page)
3 – Attachment 3, Summary of Responses to Public Comments (19 pages)
4 – Attachment 4, BLM Review of Supplemental Information for ONDA (5 pages)
5 – FONSI (7 pages)
6 – EA OR-06-027-060 (125 pages)

cc: Steens Mountain Advisory Council (with all five enclosures except EA)

RKARGES:doris 01/06/09:ANDREWS

South Steens AMP/EA
PROPOSED DECISION

Planning Area and South Steens Allotment

South Steens Pastures

Existing Development

- Cattle Guard
- Spring
- Corral
- Gate
- Dugout
- Trough
- Reservoir
- Pipeline
- Drift Fence
- Fence

Proposed Existing Development / Rehabilitation

- Reservoir Rehab 14
- Spring Rehab 3
- Reservoir Remove 5

Proposed New Development

- Pipeline 2 miles
- Trough 10
- Exclosure 1
- Reservoir 13
- Well 3
- Paved Road
- Closed Road
- Non-Paved Improved Road
- Primitive Road

- BLM
- Wilderness Study Area
- Wilderness
- State
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife
- Private

Frenchglen
Bridge Creek WSA
Page Springs Campground
Blitzen River WSA
Drift Fence
ER1
ER2
ER15
W3
T6
R1
Burnt Car
Butler Hill
TOMBSTONE #1
Roaring Springs Ranch
W7
T29
R18
T33 S2
ER4
R4
R5
ER3
R6
R7
ER5
STEENS #2
W16
R9
R12
S3
T24
Riddle Bros Ranch
South Steens Campground
Taber Cabin Easement
South Fork Donner Und Blitzen WSA
R13
ER16
ER6
ER23
ER17
ER7
ER8
R14
R15
T21 S1
OR
R16B
R16A
EXCLOSURE
R17
ER18
ER9
ER10
HOME CREEK #3
ER11
ER12
ER13
ER14
Home Creek Butte
Home Creek WSA

1 0.5 0 1 Miles

N

Note: No warranty is made by the Bureau of Land Management as to the accuracy, reliability or completeness of these data for individual or aggregate use with other data. Original data was compiled from various sources. This information may not meet National Map Accuracy Standards. This product was developed through digital means and may be updated without notification. Ownership boundaries are accurate to within plus or minus 200 feet. Make local inquiry of road conditions in remote areas. Some roads are impassable following severe weather. Roads shown may not be all existing roads. Always seek private landowner permission before using or crossing their lands.

US DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
Bureau of Land Management
Burns District, Oregon
Andrews Resource Area

projects\WSA_Waterhole\FINALMAPS\ SSWaterDevProposedDecision.mxd; December 2008

Steens Mountain Advisory Council

1784 (020)

September 23, 2008

Dana Shuford
Bureau of Land Management (BLM)
Burns District Office
28910 Hwy 20 West
Hines, Oregon 97738

Dear Mr. Shuford:

During the Steens Mountain Advisory Council (SMAC) meeting held September 11 and 12, 2008, the following recommendations were made by unanimous agreement:

Regarding the South Steens Allotment Management Plan:

1. The new water development will not increase the number of permitted Animal Units per Month (AUMs) or Appropriate Management Level (AML) management plan on the South Steens Allotment. The intent of the SMAC's recommendation is that the existing allowed AUMs can be managed in a more ecologically balanced manner.

2. Springs should be fenced to exclude livestock and wild horses. Those springs are Three Springs (and Road Spring), Burnt Car, and Kuney Spring. Fencing material should be natural, for example, split rail juniper or rock fence or other natural fencing material that would accomplish the goal of excluding livestock and wild horses. At these springs, the BLM should build water structures for human access and use. These developments should be built to minimize visual impacts. Other than at Three Springs, where there is only enough water for human and wildlife use at the spring, troughs may be set up outside the spring exclosures for livestock, wild horses and wildlife. Troughs or other water developments should be made of natural local stone or products that look natural (i.e. concrete).

3. The BLM realign the road away from Road Spring.

4. The SMAC observed that existing reservoirs were not designed or constructed to be obscure, or for low impact on wilderness values. The SMAC recommends that new reservoirs will be screened and naturalized to reduce impacts to wilderness characteristics. Other than R9, the SMAC supports the BLM's proposed action for reservoirs. R9 was identified by Oregon Natural Desert Association's (ONDA) biologist as a unique meadow with substantial wildlife and wilderness values that needed to be protected. As a result, the SMAC recommends not developing R9.

5. The SMAC has no objection to the two wells (W7 & W3) on non-Wilderness Study Area (WSA). In regard to the well at Long Dam (W16) the SMAC strongly recommends that no well be constructed at this site because it is a low priority well scheduled only to be used in extreme conditions, and it adversely affects wilderness values from noise and presence of mechanized equipment. However, if the BLM elects to construct a well at this site or any of the other sites the wells should be constructed as follows: A "bunker" should be dug for the placement of a temporary generator. The generator should be below ground, and covered for camouflage, as well as to minimize noise. Pipes from the well should be buried or rocked over. Rocks should be replaced over pipes with the mossy side up. Any troughs for well water should be robust in design and made from local stone, or possibly from concrete designed to look like stone. The SMAC also recommends that for the Long Dam well (W16), if the BLM chooses to construct the well, that it only be used to save wild horses and wildlife in extreme drought situations, and only for a short period of time because of the noise impact of the generator to wilderness values.

6. Eliminate the proposed pipelines P7, P8 and P16. Install (W7) and trough. The well (W7) and trough are sufficient to accomplish the BLM's goals in this area.

7. Where possible, all storage tanks or other water storage structures proposed in this Environmental Assessment (EA) be buried and completely naturalized.

8. ER 11 – 14 and ER 19 – 22 should not be removed. These reservoirs are already naturalized, and to the extent that they are not, the BLM should naturalize them. The SMAC believes that removing them will have greater adverse impacts to wilderness values than leaving them in place.

The SMAC recommends the BLM manage the AML at the low end of the targeted range for the South Steens Allotment. The SMAC understands, after touring the allotment, that wild horses have an impact on the ecological integrity of the area. The SMAC believes that for the management plan to accomplish its stated goals, the management of wild horses has to be an integral part of BLM's management of the area.

The SMAC recommends that the BLM enter into a cooperative arrangement with the permit holder, local watershed council and other interested parties to manage junipers on the South Steens Allotment concurrent with placement of water developments. The SMAC believes that this will allow the BLM to reach their water development goals while minimizing the adverse effects on wilderness values. The SMAC believes that reducing the encroachment of junipers in the allotment will increase overall water availability on the allotment and help restore the natural hydrologic cycle (see North Steens Ecosystem Restoration Project Environmental Impact Statement).

The SMAC defines naturalized to include the use of natural material and native vegetation to the greatest extent possible to minimize the visual intrusion of any manmade water developments. This can include but not limited to using local rocks and junipers, matching natural slopes and contours, and planting native vegetation. Man made materials can be used if it simulates natural materials in color and texture. For example, concrete troughs can be colored and textured to represent surrounding materials.

Sincerely,

Pamela Hardy
Chairperson, Steens Mountain Advisory Council

United States Department of the Interior

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
Burns District Office
28910 Hwy 20 West
Hines, Oregon 97738

IN REPLY REFER TO:

1020 (OR-027) P

Rod Klus
Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife
P.O. Box 8
Hines, Oregon 97738

Dear Mr. Klus:

I want to take this opportunity to thank you for meeting with the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) staff and me on November 3, 2008, to discuss the South Steens Allotment Management Plan/Environmental Assessment (AMP/EA). The discussion was very helpful in understanding the concerns of Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) and developing a Proposed Decision taking into consideration these concerns.

In your comment letter, you stated BLM did not adequately address impacts to sage-grouse and mule deer habitat. As I stated during the meeting, I felt the EA did adequately address the impacts to these resources. It is now my understanding the intent of this comment was to relay BLM did not address ODFW's scoping comments as additional water developments, particularly wells, were added to the proposal. As explained, through scoping wild horse needs were identified as an issue. The intent of the additional water developments was to provide live, reliable, late-season water (e.g., wells) to address this issue. As noted by both parties, BLM's mission is to balance multiple resources in an ecological manner whereas ODFW's focus is wildlife and their habitat.

Through additional discussions, it was noted you recommended the well at Bald Headed Camp and associated pipelines and troughs be removed from the Proposed Decision and the well at Long Dam could remain as part of the proposal for use as an emergency measure. You stated you liked the spring developments and said you were willing to accept the project. In addition, language regarding management of bitterbrush was added to the Proposed Decision as an upland goal of the AMP.

Thank you once again for your willingness to work with the BLM on this project as well as other projects within the Burns District. We appreciate your comments.

Sincerely,

/s/ Dana Shuford

Dana R. Shuford
District Manager

Attachment 3

Responses to Public Comments
South Steens Allotment Management Plan/Environmental Assessment

Comment 1: Here is my wish list for the BLM: Federal buyout of grazing permits and a phasing out of cattle on Steens Mountain. BLM land management plan must implement cattle removal and restoration of native ecosystems. Particularly native grasses and streamside vegetation.

Response 1: The Steens Mountain Cooperative Management and Protection Act of 2000 (Steens Act) created a 97,229-acre "No Livestock Grazing Area" within Steens Mountain Wilderness. Beginning in 2003, all domestic livestock were excluded from Bureau of Land Management (BLM) administered lands within this area. In addition, a purpose of the Steens Act is, "To promote viable and sustainable grazing…". In 2005, the BLM published the Record of Decision (ROD) for the Steens Mountain Cooperative Management and Protection Area Resource Management Plan (CMPA RMP) stating as a goal, "Manage for a sustained level of livestock grazing while maintaining healthy public land resources." The BLM also considered complete removal of livestock from the allotment, but did not fully analyze this alternative (Environmental Assessment (EA) page 34).

Comment 2: Choose Alternative A (No Action Alternative).

Response 2: Please refer to the table under Rationale in the Proposed Decision.

Comment 3: BLM must prepare an EIS for the South Steens water development project.

Response 3: Please see below for specific responses to comments on wilderness values, wildlife habitat, watersheds, vegetation, soils, and sage-grouse habitat. The analysis in the EA did not reveal any significant effects on the human environment that would warrant preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) [EA pages 47-53 (Special Status Species), 54-63 (Wetland/Riparian Areas and Water Quality), 65-84 (Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs)), 84-95 (Vegetation, Soils, and Biological Soil Crusts (BSCs) and 116-118 (Wildlife)]. The Finding of No Significant Impact considered the Council on Environmental Quality's (CEQ) criteria for significance (40 CFR 1508.27), both with regard to context and intensity of impacts and found the environmental effects, together with an extensive list of Project Design Features, against the tests of significance did not constitute a major Federal action having a significant effect on the human environment. Therefore, an EIS will not be prepared.

Comment 4: The project is based on the flawed premise that Roaring Springs Ranch must be accommodated for "lost forage and water" following closure of the Donner und Blitzen Wild and Scenic River corridor to grazing and designation in the Steens Act of the No Livestock Grazing Area.

Response 4: Roaring Springs Ranch was compensated for lost forage for the pastures *now located within the No Livestock Grazing Area*. Except for a water gap at Tabor Cabin, South Steens Allotment is outside the No Livestock Grazing Area and the Wild and Scenic River (WSR) corridor. The purpose of this project is to provide live, reliable late season water for livestock *and wild horses* on the remainder of the allotment. As stated in the EA on page 6, "Following the legislated land exchanges and further implementation of the Steens Act and subsequent RMP, Roaring Springs Ranch, Inc., has utilized on average 4,359 AUMs per year (2003-2007) of their permitted 9,577 AUMs due to lack of water; approximately 60,055 acres of the South Steens Herd Area (HA) were placed in inactive HA status; additional fencing was constructed along the Donner und Blitzen River restricting horse movement between summer and winter ranges and access to live water; and fencing also eliminated livestock access to reliable, late-season water (Donner und Blitzen River). *The full effects of the Steens Act and subsequent fencing were not fully realized until implementation was complete followed by several years of drought"* (emphasis added).

Comment 5: This project will not meet the WSA non-impairment guidelines.

Response 5: This comment is addressed in the "Wilderness Study Area Assessment" section of the Proposed Decision (pages 4-6).

Comment 6: BLM must study the impacts of its proposal on wilderness characteristics present in the area.

Response 6: An intensive inventory evaluating the presence or absence of wilderness character on the BLM-administered lands in the project area was completed in the early 1980s. The inventory found that wilderness character was not present on BLM-administered lands in the project area. In 2003, an interdisciplinary team reviewed and evaluated current conditions and information provided by the Oregon Natural Desert Association (ONDA) for the wilderness inventory units that fall within the project area. No changes to conditions were identified that would modify the findings of the 1980 inventory. Based on that analysis, the BLM determined that its 1980's inventory finding that BLM-administered lands within the project area do not possess wilderness character remains valid. As such, wilderness character was not analyzed further in the EA (EA pages 11-12).

In *ONDA v Shuford* (June 2007), the U.S. District Court upheld BLM's methodology and findings under National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969 and Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) of 1976, regarding the update of its wilderness inventory that was part of the planning process for the Steens Mountain CMPA ROD/RMP (August 2005).

The Court found that the record in *Shuford* showed that BLM had evaluated existing information and information submitted by ONDA related to wilderness resources. Recently, the Interior Board of Land Appeals *[ONDA, 173 IBLA 348 (2008)]* found that when BLM has completed an inventory of the wilderness resource and reached the conclusion that no lands meeting the necessary wilderness criteria are present in the project area, there is no NEPA requirement that BLM include a wilderness resource discussion in an EA. The Board stated, "There is no NEPA requirement that BLM include a wilderness resource discussion in an EA, unless the proposed action will result in environmental impacts to such a resource. When BLM has compiled the 'hard data' in satisfaction of its FLPMA inventory obligation that support its determination that the requisite wilderness characteristics are not found within the project area outside of existing WSAs, that 'hard data' need not be repeated in the EA concluding that no impact will occur to the wilderness resource." *[ONDA, 173 IBLA 354 (2008)]*.

While BLM agrees that individual characteristics of wilderness may have some aspects in common with other multiple use values of an area—such as recreation, scenery or habitat—BLM disagrees that an area can qualify as having wilderness value if not all of the required characteristics of wilderness are present. In order for an area to possess wilderness value, or qualify for potential management to protect wilderness value, it must have all of the necessary characteristics of wilderness. Wilderness is defined in the Wilderness Act and this definition is adopted in FLPMA. 43 U.S.C. § 1702(i) (providing that the term "wilderness" as used in section 1782 of FLPMA shall have the same meaning as it does in the Wilderness Act, 16 U.S.C. § 1131(c)). As the Ninth Circuit noted, "'wilderness characteristics' is a carefully-defined statutory concept, originating in the Wilderness Act." Oregon Natural Desert Association v. Bureau of Land Management ("ONDA v. BLM"), 531 F.3d 1114, 1142 (9th Cir. July 14, 2008). In the Wilderness Act, a "wilderness" is defined, "in contrast with those areas where man and his own works dominate the landscape," as:

> an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammeled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain. An area of wilderness is further defined to mean in this chapter an area of undeveloped Federal land retaining its primeval character and influence, without permanent improvements or human habitation, which is protected and managed so as to preserve its natural conditions and which (1) generally appears to have been affected primarily by the forces of nature, with the imprint of man's work substantially unnoticeable; (2) has outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation; (3) has at least five thousand acres of land or is of sufficient size as to make practicable its preservation and use in an unimpaired condition; and (4) may also contain ecological, geological, or other features of scientific, educational, scenic, or historical value.

16 U.S.C. §1131(c). This definition makes clear that for an area to qualify as having wilderness value, it cannot just possess some of the characteristics of wilderness. For instance, solitude could well be found in the midst of an abandoned mine site, but it would hardly qualify as an area that is "affected primarily by the forces of nature, with the imprint of man's work substantially unnoticeable" and would thus not qualify as having wilderness value. Just as a WSR does not exist wherever there is water, so an area cannot be called wilderness just because it has a characteristic of wilderness. Wilderness is a carefully-defined concept, as Congress has explicitly enumerated the necessary size and set of characteristics that must exist for there to be "wilderness." If one of the required components is not present there can be, by definition, no "wilderness." If an area fails to meet a required criterion, then the individual criteria have no meaning within the context of wilderness.

Outside of the wilderness context, individual characteristics of wilderness have some aspects in common with other values associated with the definition of "multiple use" in FLPMA. This includes values such as recreation, watershed, wildlife and fish, and natural scenic values 43 U.S.C. § 1702(c). Multiple-use management includes consideration of these values. Id. §§ 1702(c), 1711(a). For example, BLM may consider the presence or absence of roads in a NEPA document where relevant to values such as recreation, scenery, watersheds, fish and wildlife. Similarly, BLM may consider naturalness as part of the natural scenic value and may consider opportunities for solitude or primitive/unconfined recreation as part of an area's recreation value. In other words, where an area lacks all of the characteristics necessary for wilderness, individual characteristics may be considered as part of other multiple-use values but they do not amount to a wilderness resource. The EA did address several of these related resources that were identified as being affected in the EA (EA Chapter III).

Comment 7: BLM's methodology related to its wilderness inventory update of BLM-administered lands in the project area is not adequate to support its findings.

Response 7: Both BLM's methodology and findings for their wilderness inventory update completed in 2003 have already recently been upheld (see Response to Comment 6).

Comment 8: Even if BLM properly evaluated wilderness characteristics at the land use planning level during those 2003 internal reviews, it now has a duty to do so in the context of this site-specific project. Finally, we provide new wilderness inventory information here, and BLM must study it as part of this NEPA process.

Response 8: The wilderness inventory update that the BLM completed in 2003 as part of the planning process for the Steens Mountain CMPA ROD/RMP (August 2005) provides an adequate environmental baseline for the wilderness resource (see Response to Comment 6) in the project area. There is no NEPA or FLPMA requirement that BLM perform a new wilderness inventory every time BLM analyzes the impacts of a proposed project, so long as BLM utilizes an adequate environmental baseline of resources in its NEPA analysis. Neither FLPMA nor the courts prescribe any particular methodology with respect to the timing of BLM's resource inventories. Broad-scale landscape factors that cause areas to lack wilderness character do not shift rapidly. Gradual changes can be ascertained over longer periods of time and, in the absence of information to the contrary, inventories can be deemed to be "current" for resource evaluation and planning purposes. In the meantime, where wilderness values are found to exist, changes resulting from management actions are evaluated and documented in NEPA analyses.

The comments and new information provided by ONDA as part of their comments on this project do not show conditions that appear to be substantially different from those present when BLM updated its wilderness inventory for the project area in 2003. The comments and new information provided by ONDA do not represent a significant change about on-the-ground conditions evaluated in 2003 for wilderness inventory units within the project area (Attachment 4). Both BLM and ONDA wilderness inventory information is available upon request.

Comment 9: ONDA also requests that BLM consider an alternative that will eliminate all artificial open-water sources on South Steens to prevent the spread of West Nile Virus and protect imperiled sage grouse on Steens Mountain.

Response 9: Eliminating all artificial open-water sources in South Steens Allotment will not meet the Purpose and Need of the project "for replacement of live, reliable, late-season water for livestock and wild horses… " Live water in the allotment currently consists of springs, three of which are proposed for exclosure under this project to aid in meeting Standards for Rangeland Health. The Donner und Blitzen River is a live, reliable, late-season water source; however, the river is excluded from livestock except for Tabor Cabin where a legal easement for water purposes exists.

Comment 10: Because BLM has refused to consider changes in land and forage allocations at the land use plan level, the full permitted use level for the allotment must be addressed at the AMP level. Each of the five alternatives considered would carry over the current allocation of 9,577 AUMs. The proposed action seeks to nearly double the forage actually consumed by cattle, since the allotment currently supports only about half of the current allocation. Importantly, the environmental analysis in the EA must study the consequences of increased grazing at the current allocation level of 9,577 AUMs, as well as those of decreasing AUMs consumed by domestic livestock. There appears to be no real analysis of the environmental consequences of doubling forage consumption on the allotment. FLPMA directs the BLM to manage the public lands for multiple use and sustained yield, to "prevent unnecessary or undue degradation" of the public lands, and to prevent "permanent impairment."

Response 10: The No Action Alternative analyzed the current situation in which livestock are only utilizing on average 4,359 AUMs per year, an approximate 45 percent reduction in livestock grazing (EA page 90). All action alternatives analyzed the effects of full utilization of the permitted 9,577 AUMs. The number of permitted AUMs will not be increased (EA page 32).

The analysis in the Proposed Action documented there is no evidence that "unnecessary or undue degradation" of the public lands would occur. Any summary of the amount of forage that has been *utilized* (grazed) should not be confused with what the allotment can *support*. The Proposed Action seeks to improve usability of forage that is available to support allocated livestock grazing.

Actual utilization of Key Forage Species has been well below the RMP management direction of 50 percent on native herbaceous forage plants (CMPA RMP/ROD page 53) in these pastures since the Steens Act was fully implemented, ranging from 26 to 40 percent in Steens Pasture and 29 to 44 percent in Tombstone Pasture, excluding 2006, when utilization monitoring did not occur due to staff shortages (EA page 87, Table 18). Portions of all pastures in the allotment have been virtually unused due to water distribution (EA page 87). Long-term trend in range condition is stable to upward in all monitoring sites in all pastures. Soil Surface Factors (stability) were stable in all monitoring sites in all pastures except one in Steens Pasture, which was due to juniper encroachment into the site (EA page 88).

Utilization of key forage species is expected to remain within the RMP management direction under the Proposed Action (EA page 101) and significant progress would be made toward achieving Rangeland Health Standards in South Steens Pasture. Planned juniper treatments would enhance existing condition of key forage species and soil surface stability as hydrologic function improves and cover of bunchgrasses, forbs and shrubs replaces juniper cover.

Comment 11: It necessarily follows that at least one reasonable alternative the BLM should have considered in this NEPA process would include *some* reduction in forage allocated to domestic livestock grazing. Instead, BLM only considers alternatives that include identical forage allocations—and some alternatives, including the proposed action, actually *increase* AUMs over the current management situation.

Response 11: Please see Response to Comment 10 above. The No Action Alternative fully analyzed a reduction in the permitted use. In addition, the Proposed Action analyzed a reduction in livestock grazing by removing livestock from spring developments and a riparian area. Please also refer to pages 34-38 of the EA regarding Alternatives Considered but not Fully Analyzed.

Comment 12: That BLM should seriously consider reductions and elimination of grazing is heightened by the South Steens Allotment's violation of key ecological rangeland health standards. The EA explains that current grazing has caused or resulted in failures to achieve watershed function, riparian/wetland area and water quality rangeland standards.

Springs throughout the allotment tend to be heavily used by cattle, and sometimes feral horses, resulting in stunted riparian communities, altered flows, excessive erosion and poor water quality. Many areas are not in properly functioning condition, and the South Fork Donner und Blitzen River and Home Creek are on DEQ's 303(d) listed for exceeding the State's water temperature standard for salmonid fish.

Response 12: The allotment cannot violate a Rangeland Health Standard. A standard can be achieved, not achieved, make progress toward, or make progress away from a set of indicators. The EA describes the reasons for failure to achieve Proper Functioning Condition (PFC) of two springs and one unmapped intermittent riparian-capable stream as site-specific and limited to small areas (a few acres at each site). The EA describes the current condition of "springs with perennial flow is largely or entirely influenced by the infrequent distribution of water for cattle and horses within pastures, resulting in concentrated hoof chiseling on saturated soils and grazing on wetland vegetation." Cattle are in part responsible for this condition, although it is difficult to determine the relative impact of cattle versus horses. The situation has not been caused by use "sometimes" by feral horses. Horses are present year-round (EA pages 6 and 56), and may contribute more to failure to achieve PFC than do cattle, which are rotated through the pastures on a grazing schedule. All three of these areas are in one of the four pastures. The other three (of five) Rangeland Health Standards have been achieved in the pasture. All Rangeland Health Standards have been achieved in the other three pastures. See Table 1: 2008 Standards for Rangeland Health Determinations (pages 5 and 6).

The EA refers to BLM Technical Reference (TR) 1737-20 (p. 22), which describes short riparian-capable stream sections, small wetlands and springs within large pastures as *generally difficult to manage effectively without the use of exclosures*. Exclosures are the proposed solution for failure to achieve Rangeland Health Standards at these small discrete riparian areas because they would achieve removal of livestock from the affected areas. With respect to reducing stocking rates to affect overuse of small riparian areas in large pastures, TR 1737-20 further states: *Reducing stocking rates may reduce the percentage of area in unsatisfactory condition, but impacts around the foci of highly used areas (e.g., riparian areas or other water) will remain the same until few, if any, animal remain* (EA page 35). A site-specific action was therefore proposed, using BLM's technical reference, to address a site-specific problem. These riparian areas have no affect on stream temperatures at Home Creek or South Fork Donner und Blitzen River. Therefore, failure to achieve PFC at these sites has no affect, nor can they have any effect on stream temperature, the parameter for which they were included on Oregon Department of Environmental Quality's (ODEQ's) 303(d) list of water quality-impaired streams.

Comment 13: As part of that analysis, please provide the data that established, and which support, the carrying capacity, AUM levels and stocking rates used previously, and considered and selected in this AMP.

Response 13: As described in the 1995 South Steens Allotment Management Plan (AMP), grazing capacity was calculated based on rangeland monitoring studies (climate, forage index, actual use and utilization) completed in 1989. A combination of calculations and estimates were used to determine pasture grazing capacity where adequate data was not available. This initial grazing capacity was intended to be adjusted based on results of additional future rangeland monitoring studies. These studies have indicated range condition of upland sites in South Steens Allotment have been stable or in an upward trend, as summarized in an evaluation of monitoring studies completed in 1989 (South Steens AMP 1995 page 23), when Tombstone and Home Creek Pastures were still part of South Steens Pasture, and studies completed for the AMU RMP (Appendix J-10) since the Steens Act subdivided the pasture.

Comment 14: BLM appears to be operating under the premise that the Steens Act somehow limits its options – and specifically, that the Act somehow requires BLM to provide for replacement forage and water and to "provide a similar manner and degree of grazing occurring prior to the exclusion of the river." The words "similar manner and degree" simply do not appear in the Steens Act. Nor is there anything in the Act about providing for economically "viable" ranching operations.

Response 14: BLM agrees the words "similar manner and degree" do not appear in the Steens Act. Your comment was taken out of context. The statement was made as part of the Purpose and Need and states, "Additional sources of live, reliable, late-season water would replace water historically used from Donner und Blitzen River by wild horses and Roaring Springs Ranch, Inc. (and preceding ranchers cumulatively over 100 years), and help provide a similar manner and degree of grazing occurring prior to exclusion of the river." BLM also agrees there is nothing in the Act about "providing for economically viable ranching operations." The correct phrase, as stated under the purposes of the Steens Act in Section I (b) (11) is, "To *promote* viable and sustainable grazing and recreation operations on private and public lands" (emphasis added). This change has been made throughout the EA as applicable.

Comment 15: While the Steens Act expresses *objectives* that include "promoting" "sustainable" grazing uses, there is no question that the single, overriding purpose of the Act with respect to BLM's management of the public lands within the CMPA is to protect the "long-term ecological integrity" of Steens Mountain.

Response 15: Purpose number 12 of the Steens Act, Section I (b), lists protecting the long-term ecological integrity of Steens Mountain along with 12 other *purposes*. See Response to Comment 14 above. Nothing in Section 1 of the Steens Act weights the importance of one purpose over another. However, if they are listed in order of importance, promoting viable and sustainable grazing and recreation operations is listed before protecting ecological integrity. We do not believe this was Congress' intent.

Comment 16: The EA contains flawed analysis regarding the transportation plan required under the Steens Act.

Response 16: The *ONDA v. Shuford* Court declined ONDA's request that the Transportation Plan (TP) be vacated in an Order of July 8, 2008. The Court noted that BLM should be afforded the opportunity to utilize the information in the TP and Travel Management Plan (TMP) to comply with the Court's Opinion. The Order of July 8, 2008 does not make a ruling on the merits of the TMP nor does it provide for stopping TMP implementation. In addition, the Interior Board of Land Appeals has yet to make a final ruling on the TMP and has only stayed the obscure routes from being displayed on public maps.

Comment 17: Please indicate how many historic leks are present on the allotment, as well as the date(s) when BLM last surveyed for present and/or historic sites.

Response 17: As of 2007, there was only one known "historic" sage-grouse lek in South Steens Allotment as indicated through information received from the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW). In 2008, during annual trend lek monitoring completed by ODFW, male sage-grouse were present at this lek. The ODFW has not indicated if this changes the lek from historic to active status or whether more monitoring in future years is needed to determine that status. The ODFW conducts systematic surveys for undiscovered active leks and completed the last survey of this area in 2007. It is not possible to survey for historic leks as the birds are not present any more during the breeding season. Known leks that were active in the past (historic) can be monitored on a yearly basis to determine if male sage-grouse are using the lek again. The BLM helps monitor certain leks on an annual basis for current year's counts to help ODFW in their effort to maintain current information for population estimates.

Comment 18: It is clear that the impacts to wildlife of creating new water development projects and expanding the presence of livestock on this landscape will be significant and negative.

Response 18: While the effects to certain wildlife species may be negative, there was a determination these effects would not be significant. If the effects were determined to be significant, then an EIS would have been undertaken for this project. See Response to Comment 3.

Comment 19: BLM … identified the presence of sage grouse strutting grounds and habitat in its 1989 Final Oregon Wilderness EIS document for the WSAs at issue here. … identified sage grouse habitat is a key wilderness characteristics present in the project area.

Response 19: Sage-grouse were identified as a supplemental value in the Wilderness EIS not a key value.

Comment 20: Construction of new or renovated water developments will accelerate this species' decline toward extinction by, among other things, fragmenting its habitat,… and providing an astounding number of new water sources for West Nile virus-carrying mosquitoes.

Response 20: If impacts to sage-grouse habitat were significant in nature, such as fragmentation or providing an "astounding" number of new water sources, then an EIS would have been completed for this project. Several permanently wet areas around BLM Burns District that are closer to recent West Nile Virus (WNV) outbreaks than the project area have not had any recorded deaths in sage-grouse populations. These areas were checked by ODFW for evidence of WNV associated mortalities in sage-grouse populations but none were found. Reservoirs in and near the project area such as Long Dam and Desert Meadow Reservoirs, usually hold water yearlong and have not had any known WNV outbreaks. If WNV was prevalent in the area such as around Malheur Lake which consistently has water from year to year, then the probability of WNV carrying mosquitoes moving up the Donner und Blitzen drainage would be of concern. The addition of 13 reservoirs and troughs associated with new wells does not increase the probability of WNV outbreak substantially.

Comment 21: BLM's chosen 1 km (0.6-mi.) buffer around livestock developments is wholly inadequate and will imperil sage grouse on Steens Mountain. The scientific literature indicates there should be no manipulation of sagebrush habitats within at least 3 miles of active leks. *See e.g.*, Connelly *et al*. (2000). (The Oregon Sage Grouse Plan (2005), which BLM has not adopted, recommends "at least" a 1 km buffer.) …. BLM's 1 km buffer appears to have been adopted to justify the proposed action and is not based on any reputable science. A 1 km buffer is not enough to avoid a declining trend.

Response 21: The recommendation of "at least" a 1 km buffer included in the "Greater Sage-Grouse Conservation Assessment and Strategy for Oregon" (Strategy) (Hagen 2005) was based on Oregon BLM's "Greater Sage-Grouse and Sagebrush Steppe Ecosystems Management Guidelines" (2000) and other research (refer to the Strategy pages 104-116) which recommends "at least 1 km" for construction of new livestock facilities such as water troughs. Both documents were based on the best available science. The Oregon Strategy was completed 5 years after the BLM guidelines and if new information was available showing the buffer should have been larger than at least 1 km for this type of project, then it would have been included in the Oregon Strategy. The BLM is a signatory to the Oregon Strategy and as such is implementing the Strategy as referenced in the Steens Mountain CMPA ROD and (RMP page 36). The reference to Connelly et al. (2000) when reviewing the article refers to vegetation manipulation within 5 km (at 3 miles) of a lek in the form of prescribed fire, herbicide use or other sagebrush control activities that would remove large acreages of sagebrush.

Comment 22: This is particularly important given the current cheatgrass expansion on Steens Mountain, which has and will continue to result in cumulative impacts to sage grouse, including direct loss of sagebrush habitat and further fragmentation of existing remaining habitat. See Meinke et al. (2008).

Response 22: Since this document is "in Press" as cited in your comments and not available to the general public for review of the research, this comment cannot be considered valid and no response will be provided. Usual protocol for articles that are in press would be to list other researchers included in the *et al.* as well as the journal in which the article is to be published. Please make available copies of this article for BLM review.

Comment 23: When combined with BLM's decision in the TMP to designate a route system with extremely high road densities and concomitantly inadequate preservation of core areas, there will be essentially no unfragmented habitat remaining on Steens Mountain.

Response 23: Road densities in the TMP analysis were less than 1-mile of road per square mile of land in this portion of the TMP planning area (TMP EA pages 31-45). This is a low road density compared to other areas such as U.S. Forest Service lands which may reach 3 or 4 miles of road per square mile. Core areas as determined in the TMP EA were approximately 45 percent of the total of public lands within the CMPA (TMP EA page 45).

Comment 24: …raising concerns over why BLM is not seeking to increase sage grouse capacity in productive areas to compensate for the severe impacts that reduced populations across their range may be having on their viability.

Response 24: The BLM can provide habitat for sage-grouse but whether sage-grouse respond to the habitat which may appear to be in good condition, depends on many factors. Factors affecting sage-grouse habitat capability in the project have more to do with reduction in productivity of habitat due to encroachment of juniper into big and low sagebrush vegetation types. Actions that will be completed under the North Steens Ecosystem Restoration EIS will restore sage-grouse habitat over time which may improve sage-grouse productivity.

Comment 25: ONDA is concerned that by restricting sage grouse to confined nesting ranges in relation to their leks, especially in disturbed environments (e.g., areas dissected by motorized vehicle routes, fences, pipelines and other water developments), BLM not only may be limiting their reproductive capabilities during a time when their populations are at an all-time low due to grazing and agricultural impacts, but also may be exposing their offspring to increased predation due to the confined areas where they may be found.

Response 25: The BLM is not restricting sage-grouse to confined nesting ranges. As noted in your comments as well as in this EA, depending on the study or guidelines cited, most female sage-grouse may nest within 2 miles of a lek, or 4 miles of a lek or farther. Female sage-grouse will nest wherever suitable nesting habitat exists, whether close to a lek or not.

The BLM is not limiting reproductive capabilities and has dropped two parts of the project that were close to nesting habitat in the Proposed Action (as described in the September 5, 2008 EA) based on information from the radio telemetry study completed between 1997-2000 (Crawford et al. 2000). This study showed some females traveled short distances to nest while others traveled longer distances to suitable habitat in what is now the No Livestock Grazing/Steens Mountain Wilderness area on the east side of Donner und Blitzen River. Selection of nest sites may also be based on fidelity to past nest sites. Populations are more affected by continued disturbance in oil and gas development than by temporary disturbance of construction of water facilities in the project area. The project area is not the only place on Steens Mountain where sage-grouse are found and the BLM is not confining sage-grouse to any specific areas; therefore, predation of young is not a factor in the project design.

Comment 26: Because sage grouse is a candidate species being considered for listing under the Endangered Species Act ....

Response 26: The greater sage-grouse is not a candidate species for listing under the Endangered Species Act. Its current status is a BLM Sensitive species. Just because, as you note in footnote 18, "The protection provided by policy for candidate species shall be used as the minimum level of protection for BLM sensitive species," does not automatically raise the status to that of a candidate species as you imply in your comments. Candidate species are determined by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). The sage-grouse is listed as a Species of Concern by the USFWS and is currently under status review by the USFWS for possible listing as threatened or endangered in part or all of its current range. This determination has not been finalized and until this occurs, it is still considered a BLM sensitive species (6840 Manual .06E2).

Comment 27: ….the Endangered Species Act imposes obligations on agencies to consider the impacts of their actions on listed or candidate species.

Response 27: See Response to Comment 26 above.

Comment 28: BLM's Special Status Species Management manual (Manual 6840) provides that, for candidate species such as sage grouse, BLM "shall ensure that actions authorized, funded, or carried out by the BLM do not contribute to the need for the species to become listed." Manual at .06C.

Response 28: See Response to Comment 26 above. The greater sage-grouse is a BLM sensitive species and not a candidate species. In the 6840 Manual, .06 Policy, C. Candidate Species, Number 1 under this heading states (to use the correct wording from the 6840 Manual) the BLM shall:

> 1. In coordination with the FWS…,determine, to the extent practicable, the distribution, population dynamics, current threats, abundance, and habitat needs for candidate species occurring on lands administered by the BLM;….

To this extent, we have coordinated with ODFW since they are the most knowledgeable in Oregon on sage-grouse habitat needs and population status. They have commented on this project with site-specific data and the BLM has made changes in the Proposed Decision to alleviate concerns as they relate to sage-grouse habitat. If analysis in the EA had determined that this project would have a significant effect on sage-grouse status, habitat or contribute to the need to list the species as threatened or endangered, the BLM would have undertaken an EIS for this project to determine the extent of the effects or not considered continuing on with the project.

Comment 29: BLM also must manage the habitat to conserve the species by, among other things, developing site-specific management plans and conservation strategies that incorporate specific habitat and population management objectives, ensuring BLM activities (such as authorization of livestock grazing or water development projects) are consistent with those objectives, and monitoring populations and habitats of candidate species.

Response 29: It should be noted that the part of this statement in parentheses was added by the commentor. The North Steens Ecosystem Restoration Project (North Steens Project) is a site-specific plan designed to restore sage-grouse habitat impacted by encroachment of juniper into important sage-grouse habitat. This project is designed to deal with some of the issues not addressed in the North Steens Project. When the two projects have been implemented over the next few years, there will be improvements to sage-grouse habitat by restoration of sagebrush. The increase in the number of water sources should still leave plenty of areas with suitable nesting habitat.

Comment 30: BLM also must request technical assistance from FWS on any planned action (such as issuance of a grazing allotment management plan) that may contribute to the need to list a candidate species as threatened or endangered.

Response 30: It was determined in the Oregon Strategy (page 75) as noted in the Project EA that if habitat quality meets Rangeland Health Standards, that livestock grazing is compatible with sage-grouse habitat needs. It was noted in the EA (page 1) that Rangeland Health Standards were being met except for wetland/riparian areas and livestock, wild horses, and juniper encroachment were causal factors. Projects described in the Proposed Decision are designed to alleviate these problems. If analysis in the EA had determined this project would have a significant effect on sage-grouse status, habitat or contribute to the need to list the species as threatened or endangered, the BLM would have undertaken an EIS for this project to determine the extent of the effects or not considered continuing on with the project. As such, requesting technical assistance from the FWS is not necessary.

Comment 31: Impacts to Water Quality and Quantity.

Response 31: BLM explained how the Clean Water Act (CWA) applies to the lands at issue in the EA and how BLM is carrying out CWA mandates (EA page 56). The ONDA offered no specific evidence in their comments to contradict BLM's analysis of the likely impacts of the project on the quality of water in the project area, and provides no evidence that the State would consider the project to be in violation of the CWA. South Fork Donner und Blitzen River (Donner und Blitzen Subbasin) and Home Creek (Guano Subbasin) are included on DEQ's 303(d) list (2004-2006 report) because both streams exceed the water temperature standard for salmonid fish (spawning, rearing, or presence). Stream shading from woody vegetation and changes to base flow (which augments stream flow with cool ground water) are the only ways any proposed project could influence water temperature. As analyzed in the EA, BLM's capacity to influence the *water quality parameter* (water temperature) that resulted in 303(d) listing of South Fork Donner und Blitzen River is nonmeasurable as a result of project implementation because:

- Less than .02-mile of South Fork Donner und Blitzen River is in the project area.
- The main stem and major tributaries of Donner und Blitzen River on the eastern border of the allotment are either fenced out of the allotment, or are not accessible due to steep rocky terrain, and these areas are part of the No Livestock Grazing Area of Steens Mountain Wilderness.

- To the extent that water project development, vegetation manipulation, road work and fencing would not directly or indirectly influence any perennial or intermittent stream which is tributary to South Fork Donner und Blitzen River or Home Creek, no impact to streamside shading from riparian vegetation would occur.
- Reservoirs are proposed only for ephemeral streams, which by nature capture runoff rather than base flow.

Also stated in the EA, a Water Quality Restoration Plan (WQRP) has been completed and was implemented for the Guano Subbasin in 2007. The WQRP (page 20) states: *The existing grazing management described under the Problem Description and Condition Assessment section (for Home Creek) has demonstrated maintenance and/or restoration of riparian vegetation communities and stream channel stability over historic management and condition.*

Since the EA demonstrates the project does not influence the water quality parameter (water temperature) that resulted in 303(d) listing, and ONDA has offered no new or specific information to the contrary, establishment of Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDLs) for water temperature would not influence the analysis or any decision.

ONDA also refers to a nonspecific *risk of sedimentation* from livestock grazing. No evidence was found during rangeland health standards assessment to indicate excessive sedimentation from uplands from livestock grazing, and no streams in any of the affected subbasins are on DEQ's 303(d) list because sediment is impairing water quality. Therefore, no TMDL for sediment will be formulated by DEQ. The EA clearly states: *any additional sediment generated by livestock presence around new or rehabilitated reservoirs would likely be contained within the tributary area of the reservoir, where it would settle and be retained. Therefore, effects to downstream beneficial uses, primarily resident fish and aquatic life, would likely be uncommon, episodic, occurring no more frequently than with the No Action Alternative, and not measurable after any specific storm event* (EA page 61). The ONDA offers no site-specific evidence to the contrary, nor does ONDA offer evidence to indicate that *the project is precisely analogous* to the Montana court case cited by ONDA.

Comment 32: The EA fails to provide any concrete analysis of cumulative impacts. In fact, it lacks a cumulative impacts section altogether.

Response 32: The CEQ states "[g]enerally, agencies can conduct an adequate cumulative effects analysis by focusing on the current aggregate effects of past actions without delving into the historical details of individual past actions." This is because a description of the current state of the environment (Affected Environment by resource) inherently includes the effects of past actions.

Reasonably Foreseeable Future Actions (RFFA) include those Federal and non-Federal activities not yet undertaken, but sufficiently likely to occur, that a Responsible Official of ordinary prudence would take such activities into account in reaching a decision. These Federal and non-Federal activities that must be taken into account in the analysis of cumulative impact include, but are not limited to, activities for which there are existing decisions, funding, or proposals identified by the bureau. RFFA are those for which there are existing decisions, funding, formal proposals, or which are highly probable, based on known opportunities or trends. These RFFAs must fall within the geographic scope and timeframe of the analysis being prepared. The only known RFFA within the geographic scope and timeframe of this analysis is the North Steens Project as documented on page 38 of the EA. The EA addressed this project by resource throughout the EA. No other RFFAs were identified during scoping and no other proposals are known to exist within South Steens Allotment area.

There is no requirement to have a separate cumulative impacts section. Regulations require agencies to describe and analyze the impacts but not to labor over which category to place them under. Both direct and indirect impacts accrue and interact to cause cumulative impacts as stated on page 38 of the EA.

Comment 33: The EA fails to study cumulative impacts to sage grouse populations and habitat with respect to invasive species, juniper expansion and West Nile virus on a landscape level.

Response 33: It is important to note, the BLM only manages habitat for wildlife species not wildlife populations. Please see page 45 of the EA for a discussion of cumulative effects to sagebrush dependent species. In addition, information has been added to the Special Status Species Section of the EA (pages 52-53) outlining effects of the North Steens Project relative to this project. Overall effects are believed to be neutral.

Project Design Features were created to reduce opportunities for noxious weed introduction and spread. The North Steens Project ROD also outlined three mitigation measures to reduce opportunities for introduction and spread of noxious weeds. Juniper expansion was the main focus of the North Steens Project and was also addressed in the Vegetation, Soil and BSC Section of the AMP/EA. "Since affects to these three interrelated resources (soil stability, BSCs, and vegetation) would be essentially neutral from this project, their disposition would be influenced to a much greater degree by management of expansion juniper than by any alternative considered for this project, including No Action" (page 90). WNV was addressed on pages 50, 52-54, 113, 114 and above in Response to Comment 20. No instances of WNV have been documented in Harney County since 2006 (EA page 50).

Comment 34: BLM has not undertaken any meaningful analysis of the cumulative effects to sage grouse populations in conjunction with existing, pending, or planned projects and actions that also may impact sage grouse, for example ongoing grazing and existing and planned rangeland projects and water developments on neighboring allotments.

Response 34: See Response to Comment 33 above regarding cumulative effects to sagebrush dependent species. In addition see Response to Comment 32 regarding RFFA. To the east of South Steens Allotment is Steens Mountain Wilderness. The only *speculated* RFFA in Steens Mountain Wilderness is juniper management which would require additional NEPA analysis outside the North Steens Project. To date no decisions have been made.

To the south and west of South Steens Allotment is Roaring Springs Ranch. Based on a field trip to South Steens Allotment in July 2008 by several Steens Mountain Advisory Council (SMAC) members, BLM staff, and ONDA representatives, observations indicated private lands are in better rangeland health than South Steens Allotment. Active juniper management has occurred resulting in more grass cover, wildlife, less evidence of erosion, and healthier springs. The BLM is unaware of any projects planned by Roaring Springs Ranch which may impact sage-grouse. An RFFA on the ranch is continued livestock grazing; however, it appears activities on private lands in this area have created desirable rangeland conditions for livestock and wildlife.

To the north of South Steens Allotment is the northern portion of Blitzen River WSA with the LaVoy Tables Allotment. An RFFA is continued livestock grazing. Construction of a fence for implementation of the North Steens Project is proposed north of Tombstone Pasture on BLM-administered lands outside WSA along an existing transmission line right-of-way. No other projects east of Highway 205 are proposed.

Comment 35: BLM's failure to consider pending and proposed projects is likely to result in piecemeal planning, further fragmentation of the natural landscape and harm to the long-term ecological integrity of Steens Mountain.
Response 35: See Response to Comment 32 above regarding RFFA.

Comment 36: BLM must actually assess the cumulative effects of the proposed development projects together with other existing or reasonably foreseeable projects that will impact wilderness values, roadless areas, sage grouse populations and habitat, migratory birds and wildlife, and potential harm to native plants from invasive plant species.

Response 36: See Response to Comment 32 above regarding RFFA.

Comment 37: An additional [decision] factor that should be listed is the Cooperative Agreement that the BLM has with the Steens Mountain Landowner Group.

Response 37: BLM makes mention of the Cooperative Management Agreement under the rationale section for the decision.

Comment 38: It is important to note that ONDA presented BLM and SMAC with a comprehensive inventory of areas they felt met WSA criteria. BLM and Harney County and SMAC reviewed these recommendations fully and with extreme diligence to verify current conditions and suitability. The findings of these various efforts were contained in the RMP and TMP. I would suggest a more thorough mention of this process in this section to make it clear a great deal of effort has been made to re-inventory WSA suitable lands.

Response 38: Please refer to responses above regarding other comments on the wilderness inventory.

Comment 39: I would encourage consideration of plastic sheet or vinyl liners for some of the reservoirs instead of bentonite only.

Response 39: Use of vinyl liners could be considered on a case-by-case basis.

Comment 40: Some portions of a trench will require a backhoe to dig the trench.

Response 40: Thank you for your comment. Use of a backhoe has been added to the Project Design Feature for pipelines.

Comment 41: The document reads that fences will be constructed with wire or wind rowing and piling juniper trees. I would strongly encourage that the option for log or pole fences be allowed.

Response 41: In the Proposed Decision, options for fencing of all exclosures will include using wooden posts and poles (split rail juniper), cut juniper obtained from the immediate area, barbed wire or a combination of types. Fencing will be determined site-specifically based on terrain and availability of juniper in the immediate area.

Comment 42: Stability of the Ranch Operation is a worthy and necessary objective that should not have been eliminated as a stated objective.

Response 42: This objective, while worthy, does not meet the test of an activity plan resource objective. The BLM has no method for whether or not this objective has been met after management actions have been implemented. While it could be analyzed within the NEPA document under economic impacts, stability of ranching operations is already adequately provided for under the Steens Act and is implied under the Purpose and Need section of the EA.

Comment 43: Even though the main stem of the WSR corridor is excluded from the allotment, there are small portions of the corridor within the current use area.

Response 43: Language has been added to the Goals and Objectives Section of the AMP to address the WSR.

Comment 44: I would like to see the Year 4 rest period for Hollywood moved to year two so we are not resting Home Creek and Hollywood the same year.

Response 44: This change has been made.

Comment 45: Alternative C states "remove two miles of Lauserica Fence". It is closer to 5 miles.

Response 45: According to Geographic Information System, fence to be removed is 2.1 miles. Under the Proposed Decision, this fence will not be removed.

Comment 46: It is not a fair comparison to compare BLM AUMs at $1.35 to private rent rates of $17 to $25. At these rates private care includes full care etc. BLM requires the permittee to care for the cattle, maintain fences, provide salt, work with BLM regulations, hire attorneys to defend the use, attend many meetings, etc. etc.

Response 46: Information has been added to the EA to clarify the price difference in AUMs. A thorough analysis for a complete removal of livestock alternative may have included additional affects to resources as stated in your letter. However, complete removal of livestock was considered, but not fully analyzed for reasons stated on pages 34-35 of the EA.

Comment 47: The last paragraph mentions economic viability of the operation. I would prefer a paragraph that considers the resources on private land and how valuable and important they are and how managing the whole together is important and how these BLM lands compliment the private lands and vice versa.

Response 47: A thorough analysis of a modified season of use alternative may have included additional affects to resources as stated in your letter. However, a modified season of use alternative was considered, but not fully analyzed as described on page 36 of the EA.

Comment 48: The impacts of trucks driving in and around the WSAs on a daily basis could be included as a negative impact of hauling water.

Response 48: If hauling of water was analyzed in detail, this type of information may have been included in the analysis.

Comment 49: On pages 59 and 60, I think the word "shrinking" is misleading.

Response 49: A change has been made to the wording.

Comment 50: States reservoir R1 would be constructed on a riparian-capable stream. This statement is highly debatable as to the potential of this stream.

Response 50: Under the Proposed Decision this reservoir was moved further to the west to avoid impacts to the stream's riparian capability.

Comment 51: Graze: This definition as written is misleading.

Response 51: The wording of the definition has been revised.

Literature Cited

Connelly, J.W. et al., "Guidelines to Manage Sage-Grouse Populations and Their Habitats," Wildlife Society Bulletin 28 (2000): 967–985.

Crawford, J.A., T.H. Bliss, and M.K.D. McDowell. 2000. Habitat Use by Sage Grouse at South Steens BLM Allotment. Final Report. Unpublished report. Game Bird Research Program, Dept. of Fisheries and Wildlife, Oregon State University, Corvallis.

Hagen, C.A. 2005. Greater sage-grouse conservation assessment and strategy for Oregon: a plan to maintain and enhance populations and habitat. Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, Salem, USA.

U.S. Department of Interior. 2000. BLM, USFWS, USDA-USFS, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, and Oregon Division of State Lands. Greater Sage-Grouse and Sagebrush-Steppe Ecosystems Management Guidelines. August 21, 2000. Oregon State Office, Portland, Oregon BLM. 27 pp.

U.S. Department of the Interior. Bureau of Land Management. 2001. 6840 – Special Status Species Management Manual. USDI Washington D.C. 50pg. Available at http://www.blm.gov/wo/st/en/info/regulations/Instruction_Memos_and_Bulletins/blm_manual.html

Attachment 4

Bureau of Land Management Review
of Supplemental Information for Oregon Natural Desert Association's
Blitzen River South Proposed Wilderness Study Area Addition
West Blitzen River Proposed Wilderness Study Area Addition
Roaring Springs Proposed Wilderness Study Area

Prepared by Laura Dowlan December 2, 2008

Background

An intensive wilderness inventory decision in 1980 found that wilderness character was not present on BLM-administered lands in these three Oregon Natural Desert Association (ONDA) proposed Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs) that were submitted to BLM in 2002. In 2003, as part of the planning process for the Steens Mountain Cooperative Management and Protection Area (CMPA) Record of Decision/Resource Management Plan (August 2005), BLM's wilderness inventory for these three proposed WSAs were updated by a BLM Interdisciplinary Team that reviewed and evaluated current conditions and information provided by ONDA. No changes to conditions were identified that would modify the findings of the original inventory. Based on that analysis, the BLM determined that its original inventory finding that these BLM-administered lands do not possess wilderness character remains valid.

In *ONDA v Shuford* (June 2007), the U.S. District Court upheld BLM's methodology and findings under National Environmental Policy Act and Federal Land Policy and Management Act, regarding the update of its wilderness character inventory. The court found that the record in *Shuford* showed that BLM had evaluated existing information and information submitted by ONDA related to wilderness resources.

In 2008, ONDA submitted new photos, maps and narrative for these ONDA proposed WSAs as part of their comments on the South Steens Allotment Management Plan Environmental Assessment in which they indicated that the new information would modify BLM's 2003 findings. The BLM reviewed the new information as described below and found that this information does not represent a significant change about on-the-ground conditions evaluated in 2003 and that the BLM's 2003 findings that wilderness character is not present remains valid.

Boundary Roads for all ONDA Proposed Wilderness Study Areas

Described below is BLM's response to the route information provided by ONDA in their supplemental submission for all three ONDA proposed WSAs. ONDA's supplemental route photo and map information do not present substantially new information about the on-the-ground road conditions that were evaluated in 2003. The boundary roads identified by BLM are roads that have been mechanically constructed or improved, they are currently in a useable condition and they do receive relatively regular and continuous use. These roads are not overgrown and while some of ONDA's photos indicate that there is a minimal amount of vegetation (consisting primarily of grasses) present in some of the roads (as several of ONDA's 2002 photos indicate),

this vegetation in no way makes the roads unusable or impassible. There may be short sections of the roads that have small rocks exposed in the roadway, but again, this does not make the roads unusable or impassable. All of these roads have a maintenance level of 2 under the Steens Mountain CMPA Transportation Plan (Appendix M and Map 13, August 2005) and they would be maintained if they became impassable. No changes in the management status of these roads were identified in the Steens Mountain CMPA Travel Management Plan (November 2007). These roads do receive a variety of regular uses as evidenced by the contrast between the minimal vegetation in the roads versus the larger vegetation consisting of brush and some trees shown along the roads in several of ONDA's photos. The BLM uses these roads to access BLM-administered lands for a variety of resource management and monitoring purposes and the public uses these roads to access public lands primarily in the summer and fall for a variety of recreational activities. Grazing permittees use the roads to check their livestock and to check and maintain range improvements. Several of the roads also provide access to private land inholdings surrounded by BLM-administered lands.

Blitzen River South Proposed Wilderness Study Area Addition

BLM Subunit 2-86A	**ONDA Route Name**	**ONDA 2005 Photos**
Northern	E1A*	BZS-10 (2001 photo)
Eastern	E2	HT-1 FT-38
Southern	NA	South Steens Loop Road
BLM Subunit 2-86A	**ONDA Route Name**	**ONDA 2005 Photos**
Northern	E1B	FT-44 FT-43
Western	E2	HT-1 FT-38
Eastern	E3B	FT-40 HT-10 HT-13 HT-14 HT-15
Southeast	E3A	HT-2 HT-3 HT-4 HT-5 HT-7 HT-8

*Also labeled E1B on ONDA's photo map.

West Blitzen River Proposed Wilderness Study Area Addition

BLM Subunit 2-86E	ONDA Route Name	ONDA 2005 Photos
Northern	N1a N1b	FT-34 FT-26 FT-27
Western	NA	Powerline Right-of-Way
Eastern	N3a N3b	FT-16 FT-17 FT-35 FT-19 BZN-8 (2001 photo) FT-20
Southern	NA	South Steens Loop Road

Roaring Springs Proposed Wilderness Study Area

BLM Subunit 2-85I	ONDA Route Name	ONDA Photos
Northern	NA	South Steens Loop Road
Western	NA	Private landownership
Eastern	S1	HT-57 HT-59
Southern	S3A S3B	HT-50 HT-51 HT-52 HT-55

Naturalness, Recreation and Solitude

Blitzen River South Proposed Wilderness Study Area Addition

The response below is specific to BLM Subunit 2-86B. The BLM Subunit 2-86A was found to be less than 5,000 acres and was not evaluated further.

Naturalness: No new information was provided by ONDA relative to naturalness.

Recreation: The ONDA does not provide any new information regarding outstanding opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation, but indicates a disagreement with BLM's 2003 findings. In 2003 BLM found that while the unit is natural, the shape and size of the unit as

constrained by the unit's boundaries roads when combined with the location of unnatural features, would affect the quality of the recreational opportunities to the extent that they would not be outstanding.

The only qualities ONDA identified in their 2002 submission that made recreational opportunities outstanding was the fact that their proposed WSA addition was contiguous to the Blitzen River WSA and located within the Steens Mountain CMPA. As part of BLM's 2003 evaluation, it was confirmed that this unit is not contiguous to the Blitzen River WSA, but is separated by a unit boundary road. The mere inclusion of this area in the Steens Mountain CMPA, which has many purposes of which recreation is only one, is not implicit recognition that all BLM-administered lands in the CMPA have outstanding opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation.

Solitude: While the map (Attachment 9 in ONDA's submission) ONDA provided shows shaded topographic relief and peaks, it does not have any scale, contour lines, or elevations that would provide a more accurate representation of the area. BLM did consider both topographic and vegetative screening in its 2003 evaluation and found the subunit is generally flat with several small drainages. Vegetation is a mix of junipers, sagebrush, and grasses. Opportunities for solitude are present within the subunit, but they are not outstanding.

West Blitzen River Proposed WSA Addition

Naturalness: Other than the route information, no new information was provided by ONDA relative to naturalness. As part of BLM's 2003 wilderness inventory update, it was determined that a field trip to resolve the naturalness finding was not needed given that the minimum criteria for wilderness character could not be met since neither outstanding opportunities for solitude or primitive and unconfined recreational opportunities were found present. The original inventory found this area to clearly not have wilderness character due to the presence of unnatural features.

Recreation and Solitude: Other than the route information, no new information was provided by ONDA relative to outstanding opportunities for solitude and primitive and unconfined recreation.

Roaring Springs Proposed WSA

Other than the route information, no new information was provided by ONDA relative to naturalness or outstanding opportunities for solitude and primitive and unconfined recreation.

As part of BLM's 2003 wilderness inventory update, it was determined that a field trip to resolve the naturalness finding was not needed given that minimum criteria for wilderness character could not be met since neither outstanding opportunities for solitude or primitive and unconfined recreational opportunities were found present.